Namaste. Welcome to the Summer edition of *The Lotus* newsletter. Much has transpired since the release of the Spring edition. In September I had the good fortune of returning to India. This time to attend the 70th birthday Jayanthi celebrations of Ammaji (Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani), Director of ICYER, Ananda Ashram, Pondicherry, South India.

The newsletter comes complete with an extra edition devoted to this special occasion.

Eric and I would like to take this opportunity to thank Anne Purchas and Selwyn Williams for taking some of the yoga classes while I was away. In addition we'd like to thank Paula Eady for helping out with administration related duties. The home-made meals prepared with loving care by Chik Hogg, Brenda Davies, Paula Eady and Brodie Andrews were really appreciated by Eric and Ananda.

With Christmas once again on the horizon and the 'hype' of the silly season that comes with it, it is important to find some time amongst the busyness to nurture our own well-being. Our teachers and therapists are dedicated to providing an ongoing service during the Christmas and New Year period in the tranquil surroundings of 'Whare Ora', the old homestead. A flyer outlining the Christmas/New Year schedule is available from the Centre.

For yoga students who would like to pursue yoga in-depth, the Classic Yoga Course is scheduled to start in February 2014. More information can be found on page 4 along with testimonials from two Year One Classic Yoga Course students. A prospectus is available from the Centre on request. Also on offer in February, is a four week meditation course and a one day massage workshop. A half day iridology workshop is scheduled in March. For more details refer to pages 7 - 8.

There are still spaces available on Yoga, the Antidote to Stress retreat with Dr. Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani, at Tatum Park, 28 – 30 March 2014. Please refer to page 7 for registration details. An official welcome and mantra session for retreat participants will be held in the Sanctuary behind the Lotus Centre with Dr. Ananda, before leaving for Tatum Park.

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Part Two: In the Here and Now

Part One: The Early Beginnings of The Lotus Yoga Centre and Retreat appeared in the Spring edition of The Lotus newsletter, September 2013. It led to a question from a member, “Why did you choose 129 Aro Street in Wellington as the Centre's headquarters?”

The reason was that its owners, Mr. Ali and Mrs. Eta Huszak, a refugee family who came from Hungary, offered their home to me for rental. They were my 'foster parents' on my arrival in New Zealand so to speak.

It seemed appropriate that we should set up in Aro Street and create a place where we could hold meetings and extend a warm welcome to anyone interested in yoga.

129 Aro Street

The Centre began as 'a hippy community' or perhaps should I say 'a happy community'. Those were the days of 'flower power' as they became known in the 1970's.

As the Centre grew we rented another three premises nearby. A dozen or so aspiring yoga practitioners lived and worked in peace and harmony to the best of their ability.

In the 1980's we leased 127 Cuba Mall in Wellington. Here we held many yoga classes and massage courses. We also opened The Amrita Vegetarian Restaurant and the Natural Therapy Centre.

People came to yoga classes and were hungry afterward. That saw them going to the restaurant for a good feed. Then they put on weight. Next followed a visit to the Natural Therapy Centre. Here some exercise was suggested. So it was back to yoga......

This appears the right moment to continue the second part of our story.

At the time we were interested in establishing a retreat and in 1985 we found a place on the Kapiti Coast. We closed the Centre in the city and made the move to 91 Ruapehu Street, Paraparaumu. We named it Whare Ora, or “Home of Well-being”.

91 Ruapehu Street

This was quite a big step from City to Coast. Mortgage repayments of 27% per annum meant financial hardships for many years. I don't know how we survived in those early days but we managed to hang in there. Yoga kept us going. No doubt a life of putting karma yoga into action provides the answers.

The colonial style villa proved perfect otherwise. It is surrounded by ten acres of gardens, lawns, and native bush.

There is also a pond with a site for a healing and meditation sanctuary. It was completed in the year of the Millennium and forms an important part of the Centre. Here people come together to celebrate on special occasions.

We have held many meetings, which include weddings, christenings, and birthday parties. On a personal note, Cathryn and I took our marriage vows and Ananda, our son was 'christened' in the Sanctuary.
In recent times I celebrated my 75th birthday and Cathryn her 50th. Other activities have included full moon meditation and chanting.

The set up of the Centre has changed somewhat. From a community it has become more of a family.

For many years we hosted Willing Workers on Organic farms or WWOOF for short. Most visitors came from overseas and wanted to have an experience of life in New Zealand. This way we met many wonderful folks and we were happy to share living in the country.

All went well till a couple decided to take over the Lotus Yoga Centre. This proved more controversial than entertaining. They gave up and left eventually. We are still here!

I can say that life at the Centre has been mostly good. The people we meet are just great.

It is a special privilege to have students attending the Classic Yoga Course. The course provides an in-depth study of yoga on an ongoing basis.

Since the move of the Lotus Yoga Centre from Wellington to the Kapiti Coast many things have changed. At my age I find it more difficult to adopt to a different way of doing things. We have rates and insurance and a lot of other bills to pay. Like everyone else you might say. Yes! Expenses continue to rise.

Help with the ongoing care of the gardens and lawns is greatly appreciated. Due to an injury I suffered two years ago, the grounds have become overgrown.

Fortunately, our committee is understanding. They conduct the affairs of the Centre with great diligence. We are also lucky to have Cathryn, who is an excellent administrator.

The villa is one century old and in need of major repairs. There is no spare money for this and we are appealing for help. If you have expertise in financial matters, especially how to raise money for upgrading the homestead, we would be grateful to hear from you.

Here is a list of proposed activities. Some could become regular events (weekly) while others may be held less frequently (monthly). Please let us know if you are interested. You may even want to organise an event yourself:

- Yoga classes in different styles
- Meditation
- Chanting
- Shared meals
- Cooking classes
- Films, Videos
- Health topics
- Discussions on yoga
- Art exhibitions

Aspects of a practical nature demand attention. Firstly, there is an urgent need to upgrade the main building. The Sanctuary and access must be improved. The grounds require constant attention. Working bees offer a chance to help out. Funds in the way of grants, donations should be considered to raise finance.

If you would like to help, please let us know. The Centre is registered as a charitable trust with the Charities Commission and donations above $5 are tax-deductible.

Time is also valuable and you may be able to spare a few hours every month. We do have many wonderful and talented people attending activities at the Centre.

Note that expertise of any kind is always most welcome. Indeed, it is heart-warming to acknowledge the time and effort given by so many dedicated members and friends of the Lotus Yoga Centre.

To date I have been Director-Founder of the Lotus Yoga Centre and Retreat for 42 years. Much has been achieved in that period but a lot
more needs doing. Together we can make life better. Yoga is the means and the goal. Let us share its practice and its philosophy with each other and pass on the benefits to all sentient beings on the planet.

**The Aims and Objects of the Centre are summed up as follows:**

1. Encourage all aspects of yoga.
2. Benefit the community.
3. Enhance a holistic approach to life.
4. Financial gain is not the purpose of the Centre.
5. Activities as permitted in the constitution include not for profit affairs.

**How to achieve the above mentioned Aims and Objects:**

1. Promote the study and practice of yoga.
2. Foster a reverence and feeling of unity with all life.
3. Preserve physical, mental and spiritual health on all levels.

I would like to see yoga play a greater role in the growth of global awareness:

1. Improve human relationships.
2. Increase awareness of the environment.
3. Create a fairer distribution of material resources.
4. Cultivate an appreciation of religious and philosophical ideas.

Here we have come to the end of Part Two of a three part series. Part Three: 'Where to in the future' will feature in the March 2014 edition of The Lotus.

**Note from the Author:** These articles overlap and are not in any 'historical' sequence. May you enjoy reading them.

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**Classic Yoga Course**

*by Eric Doornekamp*

You may have seen the prospectus of the Classic Yoga Course. It demands a whole-hearted commitment. Yoga practised on a regular basis requires a serious input.

The philosophical and spiritual aspects of the Classic Yoga Course are a priority. Personal growth and development are of great importance. This application on a universal level is yoga. The lessons cover postures, breathing, concentration, and meditation.

Included are different approaches of various yogic paths. The main types of yoga are hatha (physical), karma (action), bhakti (devotion), raja (mental), jnana (wisdom), mantra (sound), yantra (symbols), laya (energy).

The course covers anatomy and physiology, cleansing techniques, yoga therapy (under review), ekadasi (psychosomatic releases), historical perspectives and yoga traditions.

Relevant scriptures such as the Yoga Sutras, Bhagavad Gita, Four Vedas, Upanishads, Three Yoga Compendiums, Six Systems of Indian Philosophy and others are also studied.

So as you can see it is a very full programme. Sessions are held once a month on either a Saturday or Sunday, from 9.00 am – 1.00 pm, with a shared vegetarian lunch to follow.

The first part of the course runs over four years, with ten sessions annually. A further six years of study is available.
**Testimonials from Year One, Classic Yoga Students**

Yoga is something I have returned to time and time again over the years. I am enjoying the space in my life of being able to make this part of my daily life and eventually as my life.

I had been looking in New Zealand for "the Teacher" and as it always is, when the student is ready the teacher will come, so I truly was not surprised when a series of events through a friend lead me up the driveway of the Lotus Centre.

There on the board was the news about the Classic Yoga Course. I knew there and then that this was where I was meant to be for my Yoga.

Even when there was discussion that the Classic Yoga Course might not go ahead, I knew it would.

So our first Sunday begins.....

How often do we get to sit in front of a Teacher who has many decades of living with Yoga, as your one on one Teacher?

The year has flown by with much laughter, great learning tools, a very patient teacher who took the jabbing questions of a student and answered with such clarity that we were able to move to the next pressing question and depth of subject matter that has satisfied me on many levels.

I have been so grateful for the lack of “guruness” as this has allowed the New Zealand way of questioning, to be part of the course.

Ending each session with great company and food is an important bonus.

I truly recommend this course for anyone looking for the deeper and wider Scope of Yoga.

Love and Light,

Yolanda Price

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I have had the pleasure and absolute privilege of attending the Classic Yoga Course over these past nine months under the supportive, gracious and wise direction of Eric Doornekamp.

Eric has been a true leader of compassion, guidance, and an authority in knowledge and teaching.

The focus of the course has been broad, encompassing entire world views for living and leading a healthy and harmonious life.

In any given session we cover material that looks in depth at aspects from human evolution, physiology, anatomy, through to asanas, nutrition, health and well-being.

More often than not, we delve into big issues that reflect on the current state of the world, and our own inner life experiences. From the material we cover, we have learned how to practically apply techniques that can benefit and support both internal and external issues.

It's surprising to reflect how the year has passed so quickly. Though looking back, these past Sundays have stood out as frames of reference, often serving to draw my awareness back to that period of my experience and look at how I have changed from month to month.

Often I can see how the things that I have learned in class have helped to shape the way I live, think and act. Both the theoretical and practical knowledge I have learned has been such vital assets.

Each class at the Centre has provided me with a refuge away from the chaos of modern life, to a place of quietude, learning and reflection, not to mention the good company of friends who share in the great experience of yoga.

I am eternally grateful.

Reece Baker
New from the Centre

50th Birthday Celebrations

13th October 2013
A group of 'like minded' people gathered at Whare Ora, the old homestead at 91 Ruapehu Street, Paraparaumu to celebrate the 50th birthday of Cathryn Doornekamp.

It was heartening to have so many attend the event. Cathryn felt really blessed to be surrounded by kindred souls. Apologies and well wishes were received from near and afar.

A shared vegetarian meal followed by a scrumptious desert was enjoyed by all, in the warmth of the sun.

Cathryn pictured with Eric and son Ananda

Helping Hands

Cathryn and Eric Doornekamp would like to acknowledge the many 'helping hands' that go on behind the scenes at the Centre in the nature of karma yoga.

Anthony Britton for continuing to provide expert help with the office computer.

Reece Baker for his help setting up a new lap top and copying the contents of Eric's old computer to the lap top.

Linda Beagle for laundering the yoga sheets.

Pamela Tong for whipping some yoga sheets up to size on her sewing machine from donated bed sheets.

Brodie Andrews for dismantling the old chook house, gathering cow manure and digging it in to the pumpkin patch, and tending to various maintenance tasks.

Bruce McKnight for cutting firewood, pruning and trimming trees around the Centre.

Lyn Alexander for mowing lawns.

Selwyn Williams, Graeme Richardson, Ralph Wallace and Bruce McKnight for trimming and cutting trees around the Sanctuary.

Help in the garden is always more than welcome.
If you'd like to be of service in this way, please contact Eric or Cathryn.

Vouchers

Purchase your loved ones a voucher for Christmas.

Massage, Reiki, Yoga, Taichi Qigong vouchers are available from the Centre.
Yoga, the Antidote to Stress

Of interest to students of yoga may be “Yoga, the Antidote to Stress” with Dr. Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani 28 – 30 March 2014
Venue: Tatum Park, Levin

Dr. Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani was born in Pondicherry, South India. He is the son and successor of Yogamaharishi Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj and Yogacharini Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani, Ananda Ashram. Lotus readers may recall Dr. Ananda's visit to New Zealand in April 2009, when he facilitated a very successful Three Day Yoga Program at the Lotus Yoga Centre. Members of the Centre appointed Dr. Ananda an Honorary Member of the Lotus Yoga Centre, in recognition of his contribution to yoga. We are truly blessed to be the recipient of his teachings 'down under' once again.

The highlights of the retreat Yoga, the Antidote to Stress include learning about the patho physiology and yogic approach to stress. Participants will have training in hatha yoga, pranayama and yogic relaxation techniques. The following link gives more information: http://icyer.com/documents/miscellaneous/2014_tour.pdf

Registration Details:
$450.00 payment in full due 1st February 2014. (includes accommodation, vegetarian meals and Gitananda Yoga Association membership).
Enquires to Cathryn Doornekamp or Ann-Maree Bukholt stoneylea@vodafone.co.nz

Upcoming Courses

Meditation Course
Regular 4 week introductory block courses in meditation are held on Thursday evenings 7.30 p.m. - 9.00 p.m. at the Lotus Yoga Centre with Facilitator Eric Doornekamp.

Course starting dates: 13 Feb 2014, 13 Mar 2014, 10 April 2014
The aim of the Meditation Course is to reduce stress and achieve peace of mind, increasing energy levels.
You will learn that by controlling your breathing and becoming more aware of your habit patterns, you have the key to liberation.
Cost $45.00 Repeats $30.00
Prior enrolments are essential.

Iridology Workshop
Which one of the five Iris types are you? Find out on Sunday 16 March 2014 10.00 a.m. - 1.00 p.m. with Course Facilitator Eric Doornekamp
In this ½ day workshop you will learn what the reading of the eyes reveals:
* Constitutional strengths or weaknesses
* Nutritional requirements
* Inherent (genetic) strengths and weaknesses
* Toxic build-up in the body
* The condition of your elimination channels. Which ones can you improve?
Cost $35.00 prepaid. Bookings Essential
**Classic Yoga Course Invitation**

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN PERSONAL GROWTH AND SELF-DEVELOPMENT?

The Classic Yoga Course is an in-depth course aimed at those who are able to dedicate more time to the practice and theory of yoga. The course is progressive, with an ongoing commitment. Participation in the lessons is required. The course is therefore only suited to individuals with discipline, sincere dedication and a deep love of yoga.

With once-monthly meetings on a Saturday over a period of four years, this course covers major aspects of yoga, enabling the student to gain insight into its practice. Topics are of an ongoing nature and include different paths of yoga, breath control and relaxation techniques. The course aims to provide a deeper insight through physical, emotional, mental and spiritual development.

Facilitator Eric Doornekamp is a practising yoga therapist, with a Ph. D. in yoga issued by Vishwa Unnyaya Samsad. He studied under Yogamaharishi Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri in 1968 at Ananda Ashram, Pondicherry, South India.

The next Classic Yoga Course is scheduled to start on: **8th February 2014**

**Enrolment: Dec 2013 – Jan 2014.**

A full prospectus is available from the Centre. For more information or to enrol, please contact Cathryn Doornekamp.

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**Massage Workshop**

Relax knotted muscles and unwind frayed nerves.

Treat yourself to a one-day hands on Massage workshop for family and friends with Facilitator Eric Doornekamp.

**Sunday 23 February 2014**

9.30 a.m. - 4.30 p.m. **Cost $70.00** prepaid.

The content of the workshop is ideal for the beginner or an excellent refresher for those wanting to brush up on their techniques. It covers the basics in Swedish massage: back, neck, shoulders, face, arms and legs; both theory and practice.

**Numbers are limited. Bookings essential.**

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**Special Offers**

**REIKI by KOHA**

with Graeme Richardson, Practitioner Level 3 is available **until Christmas**.

To make an appointment please contact Cathryn Doornekamp.

The Lotus Yoga Centre would like to thank you for your continued support this year. The best compliment you can pay us is the referral of your family and friends. The majority of new attendees in the classes come by 'word of mouth'.

As a token of our appreciation, we are making the following offer to all current ten-session card holders:

**Introduce a friend to YOGA or TAICHI QIGONG and receive a free class when this person books for a minimum of four classes.**

This offer is available immediately, and is valid until **28 February 2014**.
**Products for Purchase**

**Organic Produce**

Surplus organic produce from the orchard and vegetable garden is available by gold coin donation.

**Supplements**

Malcolm Harker's Herbal Remedies and Lifestream Spirulina tablets and powder are available on request.
Practitioner range supplements are available by appointment.

**Books**

The following books published by the Centre are available for purchase:

- **Amrita Cookbook**
  *Melanie Walker* - $18.00

- **Recipes from the Farmyard**
  *Bruce Collins* - $5.00 (discounted)

- **Nectar of the Lotus**
  *Eric Doornekamp* - $5.00

- **Be Fit with Yoga**
  *Eric Doornekamp* - $2.00 (discounted)

- **Relax with Yoga**
  *Eric Doornekamp* - $10.00

- **Yoga Humour**
  *Eric Doornekamp* - $9.00

**Full Members receive a 10% discount on books not already discounted.**

Postage is extra.

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**Therapies by Appointment**

**Reiki**

with Graeme Richardson

**Level 3 Reiki Practitioner**

**Member of Reiki NZ**

Reiki is a wholistic form of healing that enhances physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being.

It utilises the presence of the universal life-force to support the body's self-healing ability. The recipient draws on this energy as needed, taking an active part in the healing process.

A deep sense of relaxation, inner peace, increased vitality and improved sleep patterns are amongst the benefits reported. Stress, tension and worry are alleviated.

Reiki also assists in the relief of physical pain or discomfort caused by injury, illness or disease and speeds up recovery after surgery.

**Graeme is available by appointment**
on Wednesday afternoons during term time and most afternoons during school holidays.

**Cost**

- **$40.00** – 40 minute session
- **$160.00** – Five session concession

For more information or to make a booking please contact Cathryn Doornekamp.
Massage

Eric Doornekamp has 40 years experience in massage.
Swedish massage involves deep tissue therapy to relieve stress. Oriental massage on pressure points stimulates the flow of qi or energy in the meridians.
The benefits are well documented such as soothing nerves and relaxing sore muscles, increasing circulation.

Cost
$30.00 – ½ hour  $45.00 – 1 hour

Back/Neck/Shoulder Therapy
Eric has 40 years experience in treating backs, necks and shoulders.
Muscular and skeletal structures are examined and massage is applied to loosen up tight muscles and to relax the body.
Gentle manipulation is applied to free up the neck, spine, and limbs to realign immobile joints.
Specific programmes including flexibility and strengthening exercises are suggested to improve fitness.

Cost
Initial consultation $45.00 – ½ hour
Subsequent consultations $40.00 – ½ hour
To make an appointment please contact Cathryn or Eric Doornekamp.

Naturopathy/Iridology

Eric Doornekamp is a natural therapist with 35 years experience as an alternative health practitioner. His motto is “Nature Cures”.
The aim is to draw on the curative powers inherent in each person.
Using a holistic approach, Eric assists in this process by prescribing a health regime, such as detoxification programmes with herbs.
Vitamins and minerals are used as complimentary medicine.
Iridology may be used as a form of diagnosis.

Iridology looks at health patterns in the eyes. It is frequently used to examine a person’s status of well-being.
Abnormal markings in texture and colour of the iris may reveal the physical – mental state of the body. It is a useful tool in the preliminary diagnosis of an illness before there is a serious breakdown in health.
A free ten-minute Iridology assessment is available by appointment.

Cost for Naturopathy/Iridology:
Initial consultation $45.00 – 1 hour
Subsequent consultations $30.00 – ½ hour

To make an appointment with Eric please contact Cathryn or Eric Doornekamp.
The Lotus
Extra Edition – December 2013

Celebrating ten days of yoga sadhana at ICYER
(International Centre for Yoga Education and Research)
Ananda Ashram, Pondicherry, South India
6 – 16 September 2013

This Special Edition is dedicated to Yogacharini Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani (Ammaji) in recognition of her 70th Birthday celebrations 6 – 16 September 2013.

May the great rishi's continue to shower Ammaji with a multitude of blessings.
Editorial by Cathryn Doornekamp

This Special Edition of The Lotus released alongside the December 2013 Lotus newsletter pays tribute to the 70th birthday Jayanthi celebrations of Ammaji (Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani), Director of ICYER, Ananda Ashram, Pondicherry, South India.

Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani

I was fortunate to be amongst those to gather at Ananda Ashram for this special event. My heartfelt thanks reach out to Ammaji and her son, Dr. Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani for inviting me to lead a hatha yoga session while at the Ashram. It was indeed an honour to be entrusted with this responsibility. When I saw my name scheduled on the 10th September, I thought this had to be a good omen, as the 10th happens to be Eric's birthday. I couldn't help but wonder if the 'powers that be' had something to do with this.

The experience of teaching in Ananda Ashram the home of Rishiculture Ashtanga Yoga, and the preparation leading up to it have positively added to my journey on the yoga path. I now find myself asking: “Where to from here?”

In a glowing report that followed the celebrations, Dr. Ananda wrote:

“The gathering of my dear Gitananda Yoga family on the occasion of Ammaji's 70th Jayanthi at ICYER from 6th to 16th September 2013, was truly the confluence of a rainbow of Yogis and Yoginis. An amazing array of humane beings of different nationalities, colours, religions, gender, experience, languages and ages, all came together in Yogic harmony to celebrate with exuberance the birthday of the 'Living Siddha of Pondicherry', our beloved, most respected and admired Ammaji, the 'Yogic lioness of Tamil Nadu' in the words of Yogacharya Eric Doornekamp of New Zealand.”

Eric and Ammaji go back a long way. Here follows Eric's birthday message to Ammaji:

Wishing you a very happy day on 13th September! The difference of entering upon our respective journeys on the earth plane is seven years and three days. You will recall how we both enrolled in the yoga training course, held in 1968, under the auspices of Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri at Ananda Ashram, Pondicherry. It soon dawned on me that there was something 'special' going on between Swamiji and you but I kept that to myself. He was not particularly interested in idle talk and I made sure not to rock the boat.....

I must say that Swamiji did not favour any student in the course. In fact you were literally thrown out onto the road on one occasion. I never asked, “Why?” I guessed it had to do with you not arriving on time for one of his dynamic lectures. He hated it when someone was late.

In later years I often wondered how the Ashram would have looked without your tremendous input had you decided to walk away for good.

The yogic path is not an easy one and you have
set a brilliant example of devotion and dedication to your husband and master.

Many students just disappeared, finding the environment in the Ashram too tough. (Read yoga sadhana versus a holiday resort). These students left to complete their karmic journeys in other ways of the world.

Swamiji said that they were not ready for a yogic life. He was not one to suffer fools gladly. He called a spade a spade, digging deeply to get rid of the destructive ego. That might have hurt a lot at times.

He was a tough taskmaster who ran a guru kula and did not want to be thought of as a kindergarten teacher. On the other hand he encouraged his followers to be independent. He said, “Do not hang onto my dhoti but think for yourself”.

Today you have become a leading light on the yogic path. Your spiritual attributes and advancement of Rishi Culture are more and more appreciated. May you continue to be honoured and blessed in a thousand ways.

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Cathryn’s birthday message

Divine and most dearest Ammaji,

Thank you for being the guiding light that you are.

A star of such magnitude is so rare these days.

You are one in a million!

May you continue to be a torch bearer, igniting the flame of yoga in the hearts of all you come in contact with.

Aum Shantih

35

Cathryn

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A Message from Ammaji

20 September 2013

To the Gitananda Worldwide Yoga Family

Divine Souls: Namastey!

I think I warned you that I would be “off the radar” between Sept 5th to Sept 17th, during the 70th Birthday Anniversary Celebrations organized for me by Dr. Ananda! It was the most marvellous, fulfilling, satisfying time filled every second to the brim with Sat-Chit-Ananda!

My cup over-floweth with thanks to Dr. Ananda and all the souls who ventured out of their Samskaric routine to share it with us! The amazing structure set up by Dr. Ananda and held firmly in place by his fierce love and iron will, was supported by Cathy Davis of U.K, Vibha of Bangalore and Shobana of Czech Republic, who served as my “tripod” enabling me to move through the myriad of events despite my injured left leg!

All who attended extended the most amazing cooperation, adjustable attitudes, love, and affection, all seasoned liberally with much mirth! High spirits were the “mood” of choice! Shanti and crew served up marvellous food consistently for 12 days for more than 25 people all on perfect time! We had a lot of fun, energized each other, and most importantly of all, reminded each other why we are alive: to explore our souls! I was not the oldest of the gathering! A splendidly fit Margo Hutchinson at 75 was my senior! An inspiration to all! Hanna of Germany – Bangalore was right on my heels at age 68! Meanwhile, I am proud to say I am happily running 71!

Affectionately,

Yours in Yoga,

Amma
The occasion for gathering at Ananda Ashram in September 2013, was no ordinary get together. Right from the moment I heard news of Ammaji's 70th birthday Jayanthi celebrations I was drawn to attend this special gathering.

From experience, I've learnt to listen to callings of this nature and act on them. I hadn't planned on going back so soon after visiting the Ashram in 2011, so I thought it best to seek Divine confirmation that this was the right thing to do. No sooner than I put it out there, I received three clear signs within a short space of time, a sure indication that I was to go!

I seized the opportunity to leave a day earlier than my scheduled departure for India, and flew to Auckland to stay overnight with Dorothy, my 'adopted' mother of whom I hadn't seen for all of seven years! We had a wonderful time catching up on days gone by, before she dropped me at the airport the next morning to catch my connecting flight to India.

It was rather symbolic, Dorothy giving me a ride, as it was she that took me to Auckland airport for my flight to Buenos Aires in 1996. This is how I came to be on the yoga path, as when travelling to South America I met Eric, my spiritual partner to be.

I soon warmed to the familiar sights, sounds and smells of India, when we finally touched down in Chennai, South India on the evening of 5th September 2013. It was like I hadn't left at all! I say we, as in Singapore Selwyn and I met up with Australians, Bernadette Hearne, Heather Box and Murali for the last leg of our journey. It was great to be reunited with our Australian yoga family. The next morning in the breakfast lounge of our hotel, we met up with Shahereen Bhargava who'd arrived the day before.

Keen to move on, we ferried our luggage to the foyer to be loaded upon the roof of our vehicle. No sooner were our bags in tact, we piled in for the drive to Pondicherry. A visit to Suresh at Souvenir Travels was in order to sort out details for those going on a temple tour 17th – 22nd September and for others to make ongoing travel arrangements. Here we met up with New Zealanders, Gargi and Max, and Australians, Margo Hutchison and Kathy O'Sullivan.

After a quick shop to purchase the essentials; mosquito repellent, some Indian clothes – the required dress in the Ashram, and rugs for yoga, finally we were ready to depart for Ananda Ashram. Bubbling with enthusiasm we joined the tooting chorus of trucks, cars, buses, vans, motorbikes, bikes and bullock carts that shared the same road along with the cows, so typical of India.

Hot and sticky from the heat, we arrived on the doorstep of Ananda Ashram to be greeted by the sign above the entrance door:

“Enter here only if you are Happy”

and the welcoming faces of Yogacharini Cathy Davis, from Cornwall, UK and Yogacharini Shobana from Czech Republic.
We were shown to our rooms for a quick chance
to freshen up before the Opening Satsanga at
5.00 p.m. with Ammaji. Her message:

May we live for these ten days in the spirit of
Samradhya (sweet adjustment).

May we create Sadhana which is satwik (Pure
and Innocent), sahaj (Easy and natural) and
sukham (Both pleasant and good)!

The intensive schedule from 5.00 am – 9.00 pm
in the days that ensued was both busy and com-
prehensive. Herbal tea was served each morning
before gathering at the Ashram shrine in the
main Satsangha hall for aarthi, (fire ceremony)
at 5.30 a.m.

Meditative sitting, jattis, hatha yoga asanas,
kriyas, mudras and relaxation commenced at
6.00 a.m. on the rooftop under the instruction of
various teachers. Shobana, Murali, Aishwariya,
Radu, Gargi, Laksmi and Vibha ensured that
each day got off to a great start. The Yoga for
Jetlag session with Shobhana on the first
morning, was especially welcome for us weary
travellers!

Seniors, Cathy Davis and Margo Hutchison
conducted sessions in pranayama, while
Bernadette imparted the theory and practice of
Vibrational Breath Therapy. Meena gave a
captivating session on Yoga for Special
Children. Hanna guided us skilfully through
Mandala pranayama and Jennifer demonstrated
her artistic skills when she led us in Spiritual art
with the focus on the aum symbol.

Mantra, Bhajans and Carnatic music sessions
were held with Dr. Ananda, and Devasena of an
afternoon in the Patanjali Katil, an octagonal
shaped building akin to the Sanctuary at the
Lotus Yoga Centre. The evening satsanga
(meetings) were given by Ammaji herself.

We got to witness the wedding celebrations of
New Zealanders, Gargi and Max as they tied the
knot yogan-Hindu style at Sri Kambliswamy
Madam, the spiritual centre of ICYER. Lots of
fun was had by all as Gargi and Max carried out
basic Hindu rituals including tying of Thali,
swinging on the swing, exchanging garlands and
the seven traditional steps around the Homa.

It was lovely spending time with Gargi again. I
first met her in 2009 in Brisbane at Dr. Ananda's
weekend retreat, where she very kindly gave me
her orange sari to keep. This time, we got to
swim in the Indian ocean together, on four
occasions! Something I never thought I'd ever
do as I don't even swim in the sea in New
Zealand!

Ammaji's birthday celebrations were something
else. We were invited to a pre-birthday party at
Mango Hill Resort in Auroville where we
enjoyed swimming in a magnificent pool with a
cashew tree in the centre. The meal which
followed was absolutely divine. The highlight of
Amma's birthday celebrations was a special homa (ceremony) on the 13th. A fire ceremony conducted in the Vedic style lasting three hours was followed by a ceremonial bath, with holy, sanctified water from the pujas (rituals). I felt very blessed to be part of this sacred ritual.

We were also treated to three evening cultural events on the Ashram stage performed by students of Yoganjali Natyalayam. We were highly entertained by the musical, dance and yoga talents of the young ones who performed.

A special skit was organized that depicted the life of Swami Gitananda which had us in fits of laughter. Eric studied with Swami Gitananda in 1968. To think that I was only 5 years old then! So much has transpired since then.

Yoga has become a way of life. I have returned home feeling rejuvenated and inspired. The Ashram experience has brought new dimensions to my personal practice and teachings.

**Ten days of celebrations: ICYER, Ananda Ashram, South India 6 – 16 September 2013**

**Temple Tour**

*By Cathryn Doornekamp*

The five day temple tour of Tamil Nadu, began with an overnight train journey. After a special evening *aarathi* with Dr. Ananda at Ananda Ashram on the 17th September, Murali, Margo, Bernadette, Jennifer, Gargi, Max, Heather and I boarded a mini van at 9.00 p.m. for the drive to Villaparum. Our driver was going to drop us at the station and continue on to Madurai, our destination with the luggage. The drive was rather long and it was tempting to bed down for the night in our snug seats. Someone even joked that we should stay on board the van and skip the train ride altogether!

Fortunately Dr. Ananda had the good insight to arrange for someone to meet us at the station to ensure we caught the train. Had he not done so, I'm sure we'd have missed it! A report in a local newspaper a few days later, headed up “Trouble on all tracks at V'puram” said there are two essential bits of information that no passenger can obtain at Villaparum Railway Station, the reservation chart of arriving trains and the position of the coaches from the engine. As it was, when our helper beckoned us at close to midnight, we found ourselves running for the overbridge at the end of the platform, to meet our train, the Pandian Express (12637) on platform four. My heart sunk when I saw the train pulling in as it seemed to be a mile long. Fortunately the coaches we were designated to were only a short distance to walk!

Our air-conditioned sleeper cabins left much to be desired. For one, the smell was very unpleasant. The motion of the train was intermittent, sometimes sideways, other times up and down. I doubt whether many of us even got a wink of sleep. It certainly was a relief to disembark at 6.30 in the morning to find our driver waiting!
Ten days of celebrations: ICYER, Ananda Ashram, South India
6 – 16 September 2013

Max, Gargi, Jennifer, Murali, Bernadette, Cathryn and Heather (in the forefront)

We were received at our hotel, Star Residency in Madurai for an early check in to find the luxury of warm showers awaiting us and a self serve breakfast. Soon after that we left for Meenakshi Temple, one of the seven wonders of India.

Words and photos cannot do this magnificent temple complex justice. Spread over 17 acres, it is enclosed by 12 gopurams, the highest towering 52m over Madurai. All have been exquisitely designed and sculptured with gods, goddesses, demons and heroes.

For a virtual tour of Meenakshi Temple open the following link:
http://view360.in/virtualtour/madurai/

Other sites we visited that day, included Tirumalai Naicher Palace, and Tiruparankundram Temple, a rock-cut temple near Madurai.

Tiruparankundram Temple

Of interest to be seen here were boy monks meditating. They start as young as five years old and study for five years, following a strict schedule starting at 4.00 a.m. in the morning.

That evening Murali, Heather, Bernadette, Jennifer and I returned to Meenakshi Temple for the 9.00 p.m. closing ceremony. Here we saw Shiva being carried in procession to Parvati. This happens daily at the same time and every morning Shiva is taken out. There was a pause as Shiva stopped in front of Ganesha and then Murgha to say goodnight. The ceremony was performed in front of Parvati’s gate. It was a real fanfare with drummers and torch bearers, accompanied by chanting priests, who made various offerings to Shiva. There was lots of smoke and Shiva was continuously fanned throughout the whole ordeal!

The following day we were received at Hotel Femina for check in and lunch, after visiting Sri Rangam Ranga Nathar Temple in Trichy on the way. A short rest was in order before heading to Rockfort Temple, a temple on top of a rock.
We climbed the rock/hill through an internal staircase. Before we ventured out into the open we gained entry to the inner sanctum for Hindu's only. Murali told the temple attendant that we had come from Ananda Ashram to pay our respects to the Deities, so we were allowed in. We then climbed the outside steps to the temple at the top of the hill. Apparently there are 384 in total, but we didn't bother counting! The steps had to be navigated with care due to the unevenness of the ascent.

The view from the top was astounding, as we looked out over a spectacular array of buildings painted in bright colours. The refreshing breeze within the open barred temple was extremely welcome, given the heat of the day.

That evening was one of reflection as we dined on the rooftop of our hotel under the full moon and stars.

The next day we stopped for lunch en route to Kanchipuram, after a four hour drive. Photos of the group were taken as we farewelled Gargi and Max on their way.

The gopuram of this temple stands 59 metres high, one of the tallest in India. The hallway of 1,000 pillars and the 1008 Siva Lingams that line the inner walls of the temple are truly an

Sri Ekambaranathar Temple

The rest of us went on to Kanchipuram to check in to our hotel, the GRT Regency. Later that afternoon we ventured out to Sri Ekambaranathar Temple, situated in the middle of the busiest intersection of the city. Here we ran the gauntlet of market stalls, beggars and hawkers to get through the gate.
impressive sight, not to mention the ancient mango tree within an open courtyard that the temple is named after. "Eka" means One in Sanskrit, and "Amaram" means "Mango Tree". Hence, Ekambaram literally means "One Mango Tree".

This turned out to be the most expensive temple visit; 100 rupees each to get in (Rockfort Temple was only 6 rupees each). Then the priest who gave us blessings for our family asked for a 500 rupee donation from each of us, which we did. To top it off our guide asked for the same! By then we had wizened up. Instead, each of us gave him 100 rupees. We figured the temple did pretty well out of us, hauling in 4,200 rupees in total.

Sri Ekambaranathar Temple Blessing

We then travelled a short distance to Kamakshi Temple. No fees here or guides. Quite a contrast to Ekambaranathar Temple which we nick named the “rip off temple”.

We walked Kamakshi Temple in the dark soaking up the ambient atmosphere, before returning to our hotel for dinner.

Our temple tour was fast coming to a close. The next day we were received by Ramee Guestline Hotel at 12.30 p.m. to be told there were queues of up to three hour waits at Sri Venkateswara Temple, the reason for our visit to Tiripathi.

After lunch, Murali, Margo, Jennifer, Heather, Bernadette and I bundled in to the car for the forty minute drive up Venkata Tirupati Hill, to where the historical and holy temple of Sri Venkateswara is situated on the 7th peak.

En route we passed many pilgrims - all on foot, who our driver told us come from near and far to visit this sacred temple. At the base of the hill we were stopped at a check point. We bailed out and the car was searched. We were not exempt either! Our belongings were put on a conveyor belt to be x-rayed, similar to going through airport customs. No cameras or cell phone cameras were allowed at this temple, much like all the others, except stricter.

The winding drive up the two-lane one-way road, was a memorable one. Beautifully kept gardens featured along the way. This alone set the temple experience apart from all the rest. Many devotees opt to walk the 16 km hike to the top. The steady climb that takes two to four hours offers awesome vistas. There are many resting places and refreshment stands along the way. The path is even covered by an overhead shelter to shield off rain and is lit up for night walking.

At the top it is like a mini city, buzzing with vendors selling their wares, and huge car parks. On any given day between 50,000 – 100,000 pilgrims visit, making it one of the most visited places of worship in the world.

Our driver came with us and we joined the queue. Many were turned back with insufficient ID, including our driver! We'd been forewarned and were carrying passports and copies of our visas in hand. When we got to the officials to purchase tickets for 300 rupees each, a very helpful lady whom Margo had been speaking too, spoke to the officials on our behalf. The lady turned out to be a Government VIP, and did all the paperwork to please the officials.
We sat in a large auditorium waiting our turn to enter the queue part way through rather than go to the end. On entering the queue, the feeling I can explain was akin to being cattle in a cattle race! One could only go with the flow, being pushed along with the herd. The challenge was to keep connected, and not loose sight of the rest of the group. The intensity of being jam-packed between sweating bodies was at times overbearing. There was nothing to do, but grin and bear it! We seemed to go on for what felt like an eternity, although only an hour or so had passed before we reached the temple. The masses of bodies spilling out of the temple door were stupendous. Finally, we got the all go to go in, and what a squeeze it was. At one point my toes barely touched the floor as I was carried by the mob, and my arms felt like they were going to break!

When we reached the alter, the priest made Margo and I chant *Govinda* at least ten times before he ushered us on.

Soon we arrived at the inner square. For some reason it was less crowded here and we actually had room to move. We stood in awe of the spectacular dome standing before us in all its glowing glory. The dome named *Ananda Nilaya Divay Vimana* is covered in hammered solid gold. The Venkateswara idol, stands to a height of eight feet under the gold-gilded dome.

Next we moved on to receive prasadam, a food offering. The men handing it out were enclosed in cages! I couldn't help but think they looked 'jailed in'. A necessity though, to avoid being trampled by the masses.

All too suddenly we were squished out of the temple to be greeted by our driver. He went in for prasadam, while we stopped to watch a parade. The openness and space was much appreciated after the somewhat cramped experience we had been exposed to. We were the only foreigners in sight and all too soon we became the centre of attraction as Hindu's vied for photos with us. Reporters from a local Tamil paper also latched on to us, asking many questions and taking equally as many photos. We made headlines the next day.

Eventually our driver appeared and we climbed in to the car, for the merry descent back to our hotel. Not surprisingly, we were all on a high.

*Sri Venkateswara Temple* had to be the climax of our tour, perfectly positioned at the end for a grand finale. A memory that I will not forget in a hurry.

When I set foot on Indian soil, my cup was half full, now it is overflowing with richness from the cultural fiesta and vast array of experiences I was exposed to. Even now, I am still absorbing the magnitude of my visit on many different levels.