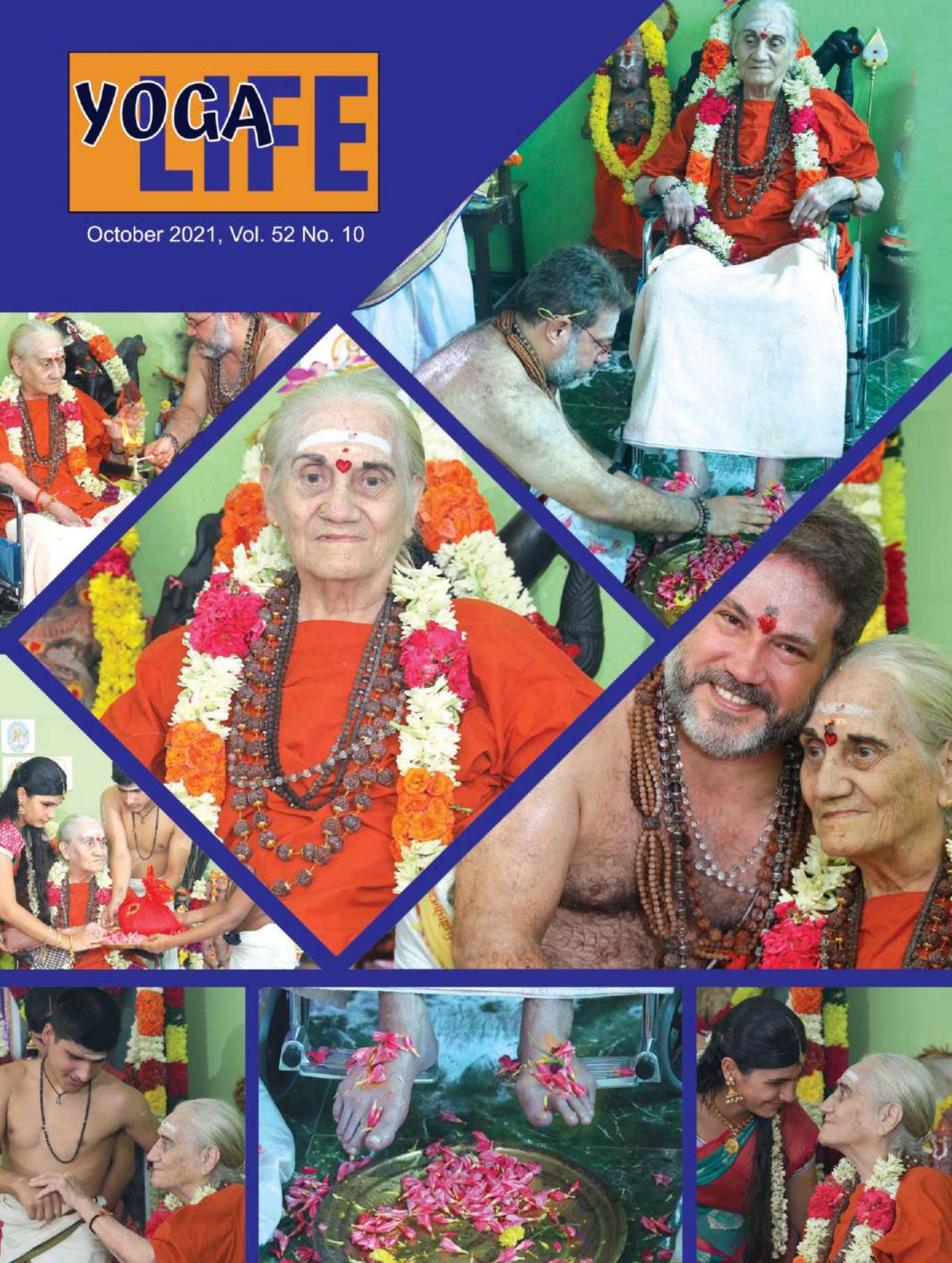


# YOGA LIFE

October 2021, Vol. 52 No. 10







Om Ganapathaye!

FIFTY TWO YEARS IN THE PROPAGATION  
OF CLASSICAL RISHICULTURE ASHTANGA YOGA

## COVER STORY

What a beautiful time we all had celebrating Pujya Ammaji's 78<sup>th</sup> birthday with so many wonderful events held in person and online. The icing on the cake was the grand Homa at ICYER performed by Pundit Sri Nataraja Shastrigal on the 13<sup>th</sup> September.

The covers of this month's **Yoga Life** are adorned by beautiful montages of loving images that capture precious moments from the most marvelous event as seen through the lens of our Ashram photographer **Sri S Velu**. These showcase the immense love, respect and admiration that our beloved Ammaji, **Yogacharini Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani** elicits in each and every one of us. She is truly the **Mother Eagle of Yoga**, and all of us her "Divine Yoga Eaglets".

**Yogasadhaka Michael McCann** of Ireland commented, "In Ammaji's writings, she mentions how the Mother Eagle goes through a dismemberment to grow again, a transformation to a new level of being. When I look at her expression, her demeanour, in this period of her transition, I see the Mother Eagle in her, that look that embraces all the vistas from an aquiline perspective. She is indeed Garuda".

Heartfelt tributes from different parts of the world find a place in this commemorative issue along with an inspiring interview by **Svami Hamsanandaji** of the **Matha Gitananda Ashram**. Though published decades ago, it is contemporary with poignant relevance for the present times.

Excellent spiritual fodder is found in other articles by **Yogasadhaka Michael McCann**, **Vidhya Komadi** and **Yogacharya Srikant** along with a masterpiece on the **Bhavana of Yoga** by Ammaji herself.

We hope all our readers will be inspired by this issue and continue to support us in our efforts to retain the wholesomeness of **Sanathana Dharma** and Yoga while spreading its message to the whole world.



## INTERNATIONAL MONTHLY

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## CELEBRATING PUJYA AMMAJI'S 78th BIRTHDAY IN STYLE

Yogacharya Dr ANANDA BALAYOGI BHAVANANI

Resident Acharya and Chairman, ICYER at Ananda Ashram, Pondicherry.

A birthday is always a special occasion, especially when it is our dearest Ammaji's birthday. This year, we were fortunate to offer our love, respects and gratitude to her on the occasion of her 78th birthday, celebrated on 13th September with a special fire ceremony, a Homa, Havan or Yagna, propitiating potent energies of the Cosmos so that those energies will bless our dearest Ammaji with health, happiness, and a long life.

Ammaji is the source of love, energy and strength for so many of us. Each and every member of the Rishiculture Gitananda Yoga family worldwide appreciates the golden opportunity we have to live on this planet at the same time as our beloved Ammaji.

The celebrations kicked off on the 11th with my heartfelt talk on Ammaji as part of my **Scintillating Saturdays**. This session '**Matru Devo Bhava**' was dedicated to her life, her teachings, and offered as a loving tribute to her manifestation as my mother, my guru and now as my God.

**Dhivya Priya Bhavanani** organized a beautiful get-together of the **Rishiculture Gitananda Yoga** family worldwide on the 12th September and hundreds of members of our family paid tribute to Ammaji through song, music, dance, melody, poetry, and by expressing their heartfelt gratitude to her. Pujya Ammaji watched the whole event live for three and a half hours and enjoyed it tremendously. She also came online, blessing everyone with her words of wisdom. To have her **Divine Darshan** on that day was a very special experience for so many.

On her actual birthday, Monday, the 13th of September, close family, students and friends came together at the ICYER Ananda Ashram for the three-hour ceremony held under the direction of our Ashram Pundit, the most amazing **Shivacharya Shri Nataraja Gurukkal**. He brought along with him fifteen of his young students training in his Veda Patashala and the mass chanting of numerous Vedic Mantras, including the Ganesha Atarvasirsha, the Mahamrityunjaya Mantra, and mantras for Dhanvantari, Sudharshana and the Navagraha Devas reverberated in the front hall of ICYER. Ammaji joined us for more than an hour during the Homa, and enjoyed every moment, looking like the royalty she indeed is. All of us witnessed in awe the manifestation of the Divine Universal Mother Herself

through her - so elegant, regal and demure. It seemed like Mother Prakruti herself was present during the performance of the Homa.

I had the privilege to perform **Pada Puja for Ammaji** and this was truly a cathartic moment for all of us who are close to her. I don't remember when I had this opportunity last, but the beatitude that manifested through me on this sacred occasion was truly a moment of Samadhi in itself. If I had done it a few years ago, my state of mind and inner perspective may have been different, but here I was being given an opportunity to worship my Mother-Guru and God. It felt like my whole life was worth living just for this moment of communion.

If I had done this **Pada Puja** a few years ago I would have done it in a very different state of mind. I would have been grateful, I would have had respect, I would have loads of love and yet this opportunity, especially at this point of time was very touching. Ammaji has enabled me to open my perspective over the past 12 months and I now 'see' the **Whole Universe** through her. She has granted the capacity, the vision of the **Divine Mother Goddess**, who is manifesting through her, through her eyes. Just as Krishna showed Ma Yashodha the Universe when he opened his mud-stained mouth, so also, I have begun to witness the grandeur of the whole Cosmos through her eyes.

Hundreds of students from all over the world logged in to **Zoom Womb** and enjoyed watching the whole event through live telecast. This gave so many of our Yoga Family an opportunity to be with us during the event, even if they were not able to make the journey to India, to Pondicherry and to the Ashram, at this point in time.

**Yogacharini Sangeeta** led a very beautiful, warm, loving chanting session in the evening that again brought together hundreds of our **Vishwa Yoga Parivar** members who participated in wishing Ammaji the best of health, wellness and happiness.

Many cakes were cut over the weekend and wonderful meals relished, manifesting a gala family time for everyone who participated in this magnificent celebration. **Gurleen of Canada** organized a very special cake to be delivered on Ammaji's birthday and it carried artwork by her loving daughter **Ayra** who had depicted Ammaji riding her famous red scooter into Pondicherry. As Ammaji was one of the very first women to ride a scooter in Pondicherry, and that too wearing a fully draped sari, this cake and the artwork on it carried very special significance.

When I asked Ammaji the next day what she thought about her three-day, weekend birthday celebration, she said, **'It was spectacular!'**

What more can we all want? What more can we all ask for?

We are truly blessed when our **Divine Living Siddha of Pondicherry** is pleased with our efforts to serve her. We are truly blessed with abundance when she gives us her loving blessings in such a wonderful manner.

May we all be worthy of her grace. May we all be worthy of her teachings. May our lives be our **Guru Dakshina to our Guru**, our most beloved Ammaji.

Divine Ammaji,

We are an outcome of all our decisions and choices we make in our life. I feel fortunate to have spent some life transforming moments in the ashram with you. Even before I met you, I was amazed to read your emails and get inspired from every word you wrote in those long, personalized emails. In this world of instant messaging, I enjoyed waiting for days to receive your email responses. An email full of words of wisdom and encouragement specially written for me.

Indeed, those few words of encouragement were what I really needed to hear. Sometimes we just want someone to understand what we feel deep inside, sometimes we just want someone to show us a new possibility. And for me I found that blessing through you Ammaji. I knew I could trust you, your intentions, your methods. **Because you always wrote straight from your heart. I could always feel that high vibrations flowing out of your every single word.**

That feeling of love attracted me to the ashram. I somehow trusted the Universe and joined the six months long residential course in 2016, leaving my corporate job. And yes, I am always proud to have made that one decision. One decision which changed my whole world, one decision that gave me a higher purpose for the rest of life.

Time has evolved now. I miss receiving your thought provoking emails. I miss listening to your day-to-day stories you used to share. But interestingly, I do not really miss your presence. As you are always guiding me with Divine Wisdom, the seeds you have sown long back are indeed manifesting each passing day. I love to connect the dots and see the beauty of life in everything around me. I now see an exciting journey in front of me. I feel powerful and unstoppable.

**Thank You Ammaji for all you have given in thoughts, words, actions and blessings. Your birthday is a reminder for us to keep following the path you have shown us all.**

With Love,

~ Yogacharya Sumit Upreti, Gitananda Yoga Mentor, New Delhi.

## THE SCHOOL OF COURAGE: AN INTERVIEW WITH AMMAJI

SVAMINI HAMSANANDA GIRI,  
Matha Gitananda Ashram, Italy

It has been 20 years since I did this interview and yet how up to date it is! How many changes and unimaginable events have taken place in this quick passing of time, but Amma's teachings are timeless. Eternal. Laden with the power of Truth.

To her, who remains a center of consciousness and love in the transformation of the elements, we bow with gratitude because great and decisive was her inspiration to build a '**Child Ashram**', the Gitananda Ashram in Italy.

How many teachings from the '**Mother Ashram**!' How much life! How many memories: from dawn to dusk, the ashram was busy with activities transmitted with infinite passion. They grew with the warmth of the sun of **Maharaj Gitananda Svamiji** but were supported and cared for with the love of **Mother Earth: Amma Meenakshi**. With the fertility of water: Amma Meenakshi. With the power of the wind: Amma Meenakshi. In each of us there is an indelible mark of a part of that kaleidoscopic wealth. The driving force of the arts, dance and singing accompanied and enriched by Yoga, the study of Hinduism and philosophy. They are intertwined like precious threads of a divine warp. How could all this have existed if our travels to India had not been so rich in experiences, so strongly inspiring?

Infinite gratitude to you Amma Meenakshi for being a great inspiration with skill and modesty, with wisdom and humility.

**Amma, you may have looked like the shadow of a great Sun, but you made us realize that the shadow and its shape are exactly One and the same substance. Now your mission is even stronger: you inspire the purest love.**

Special thanks from Svami Yogananda who has been nourished by Guru Kripa for a long time.

We join him, Ma Uma Shakti, Priyananda, Atmananda and Hamsananda as we had the honor of receiving the precious Prasad in our wonderful and fruitful stays at Ananda Ashram in our beloved Bharata Varsa. Our whole ashram is united in affection and daily prayers.

**Ammaji, we bow at your feet. Namoh Namaha!**

### Swamini Hamsananda: Can you tell us about your own personal experience?

**Pujya Ammaji:** Firstly, I must say that I am extremely grateful for having met Svamiji. All you have seen here has been possible thanks to Svamiji, the constant work in the Ashram is Svamiji himself. And not only here however, I can say that many many people, like you for example (Svami Yogananda and disciples), are still following the path of spirituality and are achieving exemplary deeds inspired by great ideals and through a truly worthy life. All this thanks to Svamiji's inspiration and spiritual support.

I realized this while I was waiting for you: not only here at the Ashram, but also elsewhere, many feel his inspiration, his energy, the strength to follow a path with high ideals, doing great work, with devotion and strength to bring a voice to the world. And this voice is like the echo of a life dedicated to Yoga and its diffusion around the world. Yesterday, at the course for teachers, Renuka Giri said: 'In Yoga, being good is not enough.' True, you have to be skilled and strong. How many good people are there in the world? They are weak, lazy, sometimes even stupid, but good. So, what's the point of being good?

Svamiji gave us a great teaching: '**Be good, but also strong, brave, sincere and act accordingly.**'

On the same occasion, Svami Yogananda also said: '**Remember that Yoga is any single action you do, at any time of the day, with ability and consciousness.**'

This sounds like an echo of Svamiji too. **All we do should be perfect.** This is Yoga. We find this great teaching in one of the most famous scriptures, the Bhagavadgita, when the Lord Krishna states: '*Yogah karmasu kaushalam,*' **Yoga is ability in action.** What he taught me echoes daily in my actions: 'When you sit to type, do it perfectly. When you cut the address labels, do it perfectly. When you stick them, do it perfectly!' This was his teaching: '**Do little things perfectly. Be careful, be aware!**'

All we do today is thanks to Svamiji's energy and teachings that have taught us to be active in our work. Svamiji himself was an incredibly active man. He founded three Ashrams, wrote twenty books, organised three world conferences, took part in many International Yoga conferences and wrote thousands of articles in addition to teaching to hundreds of thousands of students from all over the world.

His message is a message of courage because **spiritual life requires great courage**. You have to be strong and face yourself bravely. He used to make you face yourself, scolding and insulting you. He would often say: 'If I tell the truth, I insult you, but I have to tell you the truth.'

So Svamiji would speak the truth, and everyone felt hurt. He would say: 'Face the truth! It's today's truth but may not be tomorrow's! You may be stupid today but you can change!' And he showed us the way.

Many Gurus say: 'Be good, meditate on the Self, achieve God.' What good are these words? They're only words.

He would make you face yourself and give you the means to change: 'Sit in vajrasana, do mukhabhastrika, suptavajrasana, hang a yellow square on the wall and fix your gaze on it, chant this mantra, perform this puja, bring your body upside down.' When your body was bent, he would say 'Sit up and meditate!' And when your mind wasn't ready, he would say '**Wake Up!** Respond!' **Change is painful and requires a lot of courage!** But this is a truly great teaching!

Svamiji was a great promoter of the arts such as Carnatic music and dance. He was a lover of Hinduism and he wanted to promote this great ideal. He would often say to children, 'Your culture is Hinduism but you are losing it, you are not proud of it, you don't appreciate its great value! It's my duty to keep your wonderful culture alive and spread it.'

And he would use Yoga, music, dance, any method that could be useful. He promoted cultural programmes for the locals, he supported many festivals, performances, and concerts, and spent a lot of money for all these activities. He wanted to help children to continue to study in their own land so rich in culture and spirituality. Many prodigies were born among them.

The work carried out in the artistic field is very important because it is useful to convey a spiritual language. If we were to recommend a session on Hinduism this evening, nobody would come; on the other hand if we were to recommend a performance, people would come gladly to see the beautiful narrative dances on Shiva, etc. or the great Indian epics. Images linger in the mind and enter the body through emotions.

The stories of Nandanar, the humble devotee of Shiva, if represented, are no longer an abstract thing and can be remembered as positive emotions. The temple,

dance and music are forms of spiritual education. That is why Svamiji also taught Yoga through the arts. And we continue this work in the community to keep the tradition alive.

Westerners feel the void of western values and so search for new values here, but they have to be educated to the culture of Hinduism which is a religious culture on the one hand and offers a field of experience that goes beyond religion itself on the other. In fact, Hinduism is not the correct term, but rather it should be called **Sanatana Dharma**, the eternal law. The very concept of eternity includes its universality, not only for India or for a group of people. It is a Cosmic Dharma that belongs to the whole of humanity. Svamiji always taught this to people of all countries and races. **Perhaps, he said, an Englishman won't chant the name of Shiva, but what is beyond Shiva or religion is universal.**

Many are now continuing his work. Ananda is growing up and preparing to carry on his father's work. He was born here and has completely assimilated Indian culture, but he knows the Western one just as well. Svamiji's legacy is firstly to serve the community, then one's country and then the world. **We do our best to keep his spirit alive.** We do not miss him. His presence is still very close to us. Last night, watching the children, ready for the dances for his birthday celebration, I said, 'I hope Svamiji can see you, because he loved you so much, so totally. He adored you!' As I said these words, looking into the eyes of the children filled with the memory of him, we strongly felt his presence among us. The youngest children have never met him but still feel a deep bond with him.

**Hamsananda: You were born and raised in the West and after meeting Svamiji you settled and fully rooted in India, where you had an intense life full of experiences for over twenty-five years.**

**Ammaji:** I was really lucky and Svamiji is the reason. I am spending my life in the best way ever and all thanks to him alone. Work has never been an effort. I enjoyed it a lot. Everything you see, the magazine, the programmes, the lessons, all of this has never been tiring for me, but just great fun, I was very lucky to be close to Svamiji and to have his teachings.

**Hamsananda: Surely Svamiji is a source of great inspiration for all of us, his strength and energy are very evident here at the Ashram, so I can understand that you are completely imbibed with all of this, but your example of devotion and total identification with a culture foreign to you at birth are very important for us.**

Can you give some advice to us Westerners whom you know well, especially in our weak points or faults?

**Ammaji: I think it's very important for Westerners to study Hinduism. Hinduism is not a religion but a great cultural and spiritual model, an attitude, a vision of the world and a way of life that goes beyond religion itself.** It is a deep, ethical and spiritual vision of life and I think Westerners really need it. Modern humans have become cruel, void and very selfish. Even those who follow a spiritual path go on talking about themselves: 'My samadhi, my moksha, my spiritual experiences, my problems, my health, my realization', always 'my, I, I, my.' This is totally opposite to spiritual formation, in which the ego must disappear.

In Hinduism there is an idea of totality that has nothing to do with the ego. All that destroys that ego, serves to bring God closer, to experience God. I do not think these teachings can be found in the West, even if in some fields there is a humanitarian, philanthropic vision, and some artists have faced the problem of universality or speak of cosmic principles. In philosophers' and thinkers' mentality or in the arts we don't find the depth of meaning, the value of symbols as cosmic principles. Therefore, in my opinion modern seekers should study the Upanisads, the Vedas. They should return to a more spiritual dimension of life with universal, cosmic values. The concept of Dharma, the study of the scriptures and ethics, the concept of Yoga, of Guru, of devotion, of service, all these Hindu concepts can make life truly satisfying, free from stress, dissatisfaction and depression typical of Western lifestyle. **Here in India, people naturally accept these principles, while for Westerners it's a great obstacle, a huge ego that does not accept the teachings of the law of karma, that does not accept humility, duties, sacrifice if it does not benefit one's own selfishness.**

Spiritual life is very difficult for Modern humans because it requires discipline. It is important to dedicate oneself constantly to sadhana. Svamiji would say: '**Work hard but never forget your sadhana.**' Another suggestion I would like to give is contained in a sentence pronounced by Svami Yogananda: '**Search for the Guru and stay with him to the end.**' This is a great truth that Modern seekers should understand, one cannot evolve jumping here and there. An asana from one tradition, a pranayama from another, some Buddhist meditation, sometimes a little bit of Zen and then again... re-birthing, tai chi, aerobics, bio-dance, the list is infinite just like all the time lost! Yoga implies choosing a path, a system, a tradition and going deep into it achieving perfection. **Follow a Guru, follow him up to liberation!**

**Lord Rama had only one Guru, only one aim, only one enemy, only one wife, only needed one arrow with which he won over his enemy.**

Many boast of having many Gurus, but there is nothing to boast about, you cannot change your Guru, even if you are not satisfied, you must consume the karmic bond and after a long time understand the play of Karma, and realize that your dissatisfaction is nothing but an obstacle to the realization that only your Guru, with his unique bond, can give.

**Yoga teachers must not mix one Guru's techniques with another's.** This does not lead them to success even if their school is full of people. We must fear the one who is compliant to have more students. Very little truth is to be found there. In a school in which ten students end up in two, well there may be a little hope to find some truth. We must have the courage to stay on our own if necessary, even face unpopularity in the name of Truth. **Yoga is a school of courage.**

Svamiji never worried if he had or didn't have students, he would give whatever he had, and this is another important rule in spiritual life. In an Ashram, you never worry about finding students. You just work and that's it. But whoever comes, one has the duty to help. Many think that everything in an Ashram should be free. How can I make my grocery store holder understand that I do Yoga so I should have everything free? How can I make all the people with whom I work understand that I have to have everything free to be able to give everything free? All this is nonsense. Svamiji always said: **'Never take without giving, otherwise there will never be spirituality. You have to give something to get something back. In an Ashram, the cycle of giving and receiving always has very high motives. Who behaves like this in the field of spirituality is a thief but, like a thief in heaven, he cannot be successful.'**

How many spiritual people are thieves nowadays? They don't want Yoga but they want Paradise. They don't want to make the effort but they want Paradise. They don't want to serve the Guru but they want Paradise. They don't want to follow ethics but they want Paradise. And so they try to steal Mukti, to steal Samadhi. This was a typical modern attitude that Svamiji would often remark, the attitude of those who want, who are in a hurry, **whilst in India this is very rare because people know how to wait.**

**Hamsananda: I wish to conclude this interview with a short story. In Eastern education, stories have a very important role. They always make you**

**meditate on great truths in a very simple and direct manner. Everybody tells stories to express better what they want to say.**

**Ammaji:** Attitude is an essential factor in Yoga, the way we behave. How we react is important and not what we do. In a moment, for any reason, we can lose all we have achieved in life, but our attitude can make any event positive or negative.

A student asked his Guru: 'Guruji, when will I attain liberation (Moksha)?' The Guru answered, 'In thirty-three lives.' The man went away, depressed, thinking about the burden of another thirty-three lives. Another student went to the Guru and asked the same question. The Guru answered: 'My dear son, you will have another thousand lives to live.' The man burst into a cry of joy. 'Oh! Only a thousand lives before liberation!' **In that instant, he attained liberation.**

Letting oneself go to life is the key to liberation. The second student still had a thousand lives to live, but his devotion, his attitude, letting himself go, in a moment, burnt all the seeds of his future incarnations.

**This short story contains great concepts like the concept of Karma that guides our lives but from which we can free ourselves with an act of total awareness. We are the masters of our own destiny.**

Dear Yoga family,

We are all extremely fortunate to be living in this time, for wherever we reside in the Universe, as long as we had connections to the internet, we were privileged to be able to view or participate in the wonderful celebrations and ceremonies created for Ammaji's birthday by her devoted family and friends. **What a blessing she is to us all!** She is truly our **Mother in Yoga**. Through her tireless dedication she has ensured that Puja Swamij's teachings, lineage and legacy will continue into the future. She has devoted her life to the tasks she took on and carried them out with gentle grace.

Ammaji, may your **Light** continue to shine brightly and bless us with your love and may we always be worthy of that love.

With love and devotion,

**Yogashakti Yogacharini Mathaji Margo, Mentor Emeritus,  
Gitananda Yoga, Australia.**

## LUGHNASA REFLECTIONS

Yoga Sadhaka MICHAEL MCCANN,  
Member Team 52, Ireland.

One of the beautiful gifts of Yoga is that it leads us back to a world of symbols, of myth and meaning. We begin to feel intuitively what lies behind so-called things and facts, and indeed sense the whisperings and reverberations of worlds that exist behind or above this world.

The traditional metaphysics of Tantra and many other cultures teach that everything is a symbol of something higher than itself, reflecting the successive worlds (**Lokas**) which are created as the Word (**OM** or Logos), which vibrates downwards from the Absolute Reality.

Yoga is rooted in a very ancient vision of the world, beyond the reach of classical history, and enshrined in the myths of ancient scriptures, such as the Vedas of India. The sages of yore saw directly (Darshan) that everything is a symbol because their vision was pure, and because they saw with the 'eye of the heart.'

Today when we speak a word, that word will bring to the mind an image. It is said that in earlier ages, such as the **Satya Yuga** (Golden Age), the levels of reality were so transparent, that when a person saw an object, such as a tree, a swan or a rose it brought to mind its inherent meaning: 'For the sage every tree is a reflection of the tree of Paradise, every mountain a symbol of transcendence, the water of every flowing stream a symbol of Divine Mercy, the wind a mark of the Spirit' (**S.H. Nasr**).

Solomon was such a sage, who 'knew the language of the birds'. Everything communicated its meaning to him. He understood 'the tongue of the invisible.' Another was **Suka**, the son of **Vyasa**, compiler of the **Mahabharata** and the **Bhagavad Gita**. Suka was a Tantric sage, enlightened from birth, who was called 'the parrot', because his words enriched the scriptures in the way that the pecking of parrots is said to sweeten fruit. When Suka forsook his home at an early age, the distraught Vyasa called after him, and all the woods and their denizens echoed his name, because he was already one with everything!

These enigmas fill me with wonder as I sit in my garden in rural County Down, pondering the signs around me. It is early in the month of August, '**Lughnasa**', in the Gaelic language. We are now in late Summer, according to the conventional calendar, but I feel an intuitive affinity with the solar rhythms of the Celtic calendar, for which this month ushers in the valedictory cadences of Autumn.

Lughnasa, named after **Lugh**, the Celtic God of Light. Light of the Sun, but more importantly the light of the Spirit, and of Consciousness: the light of the Word, '*which enlightens everyone who comes into the world*', the Light of Shiva, the Light of Buddha, the Koranic Light, it is all the same.

I sit under a rowan tree, the berries red '*like a lip-sticked girl*', in the words of Seamus Heaney. I think of the image of the tree of Yoga, the fruit of which symbolises Samadhi. This morning two birds perched on the branches, and one enjoyed a few berries while the other looked on, and it brought to mind the archetypal image in the Upanishads of the ego and the Atman, one immersed in the world and the other the witness.

The garden is surrounded by Druid trees: rowan, birch, alder, ash, and hazel. One side is bordered by a river, where a heron fishes: patient, still and one-pointed, this solitary bird is a symbol of the meditator. The hazel is fruiting, with pale green nuts. The hazel is associated with wisdom, and in Celtic lore the nuts of wisdom dropped into a deep pool and were consumed by the 'Salmon of Knowledge'.

The fall of the nuts symbolises the descent of the spirit into matter, and the salmon in the deep pool is a Celtic symbol of the '**Kundalini Shakti**', slumbering in the hollow of 'mooladhara chakra', awaiting the first rippling of the initiatory call of Yoga: '*I went out to the hazel wood, because a fire was in my head*' (W.B. Yeats).

Beyond my garden, a beautiful field extends to the horizon. I like to gaze across it, especially when the sun shimmers off the glossy unmown grass, and '*ancient Ireland washes in, in all her unbaptised beauty*' (Patrick Kavanagh). The light of the sun allows me to see the romp and play of the wind in the grass, '*breezes following their young*' and yet it tells me that another greater Light allows me to know and enjoy the sunlight, and indeed is the source of the sun, 'light upon light.'

In the Bhagavad Gita, the body-mind is known as a field (Kshetra) in which we sow and reap our karma. The witnessing Self is '**the Knower of the field**'. Sometimes, the gazing over the outer field becomes a gazing over the inner, and a question arises, the answer already contained in its kernel, '*who indeed is the one who gazes?*'

Autumn is of course associated with harvest and with bounty, with reward for work, with gratitude to the giver, and with the keeping of seeds for next year's planting. Naturally, it is associated with rite and ritual, with celebration and sacrifice.

The word 'rite' has its roots in the Sanskrit 'Ritam' which means 'natural order', often pertaining to cosmic order, or 'Dharma'. At the heart of Ritam is sacrifice (Yajna). Rites maintain the cosmic order, and this includes the rotation of the seasons and the balance of the environment.

Yogic wisdom, particularly the Bhagavad Gita, reminds us that if we remove the sense of ritual, and sacrifice, from our lives, then the environmental ambience is disturbed, which is what we are seeing today. Karma Yoga is a natural way to play our mandatory part in 'turning the wheel of Dharma', with its emphasis on offering up, as a sacrifice, the fruit or harvest of our actions- including our Yoga practice. Everything we do in life can then become a ritual. *'Food is the life of all beings, and all food comes from rain above. Sacrifice brings the rain from Heaven, and sacrifice is sacred action'*. (Bhagavad Gita, 3:14).

Autumn also marks the third part of the sun's journey and the third part of life, a time of inner reflection, of retirement, of preparation for the spiritual journey. Self-study (swadhyaya), meditation, and reading of the scriptures become increasingly important. In India this period of life is traditionally associated with the renunciation of household duties and retirement to an ashram, or the embarking upon a pilgrimage. The glorious colours of autumn foliage symbolise the donning of the raiment of wisdom, so necessary in the autumn of our life.

The seasons of course are cyclical, and in the East, as for the Celts, were signs of the eternal recurrence of life and the 'Samsaric' journeying of the soul (jiva). In Hindu mythology, the seasons and indeed everything in the 'here- below', move to the rhythm of **Nataraja**, 'the **Cosmic Dancer**', just like the migratory swallows now swooping joyfully through the sky above me.

For this reason, the scriptures exhort us to make the best of our time, to discover our life's purpose, and to evolve spiritually in this world. Seasons come and go, and the dance continues, but behind it all is Peace and the unchanging Reality, and it is this which we must seek and eventually find.

Om Tat Sat.

## HOW MANY LIFETIMES ARE NEEDED TO COVER THESE PRICELESS TEACHINGS?

Yogacharya SRIKANT, Senior Mentor,  
Gitananda Yoga, Canada.

Do you sometimes have the feeling that there is too much to cover?

I've had this thought come up through the decades. Though not a solution and nor a cure to this feeling, but here is a logical-mathematical reason for this!

I had been teaching math for over 10 years and was given a Probability and Statistic pre-University class to teach. My first thought was oh no! The reason for this reaction (not response) was that I have an innate dislike teaching something I have not mastered. A good reference for knowledge on a subject is your ability to teach it to kids (or young adults in this situation). But the main reason for my reaction is that this branch of math never made sense to me. I could attribute it to professors covering these classes at University in a convoluted manner: here are a series of tools used in statistics. Contrary to Linear Algebra or calculus, these classes seem to lack any cohesiveness. Contrary to graduate students, I did not have to implement it in any practical situation, so my knowledge remained very superficial.

Teaching this class for the first time, I quickly realized that some of my students cared about money: does more education result in a higher salary? Others had concerns about the environment: How does pollution affect microclimates? But when a student says that they want to explore happiness and education, how do we study this? Well, we can determine a scale of subjective qualifiers that are determinants of happiness. What an interesting manipulation!

Fast-forward to the present day, having taught these classes half a dozen of times and wanting to give students some cohesiveness, I have developed a fondness in teaching this class. It is the most practical branch of math as it can be used in practically any real-life situation, including exploring my feelings when thinking about the vast practices embedded in the Gitananda tradition.

This got me thinking that if statistics and probabilities can explore any theme students have conjured up, could it be used to explore some feelings I have had about my Yoga Sadhana? Yoga, as you have probably realized, is more about quality than quantity. Statistics can do a beautiful backflip and quantify the qualitative!

My simple aim was to get an idea of how many Hatha Yoga sessions could we experience. In the context of team 52 completing Module 3, let's say that a Sadhaka

has 10 different ways to start a session (warm up phase: stretch, Mukha Bhastrika, etc.). They can opt for any one of the 3 versions of the Surya namaskar, a combination of them or none at all. At the Ashram, we are taught the Asanas as part of 9 main groups (Sama Sthithi group, Loma villoma group, Hatheenas, etc.) and for simplicity's sake, let's just say they each contain 9 Asanas. We also have learnt at least 9 Pranayamas (though Swamiji talks about 81 Pranayamas in this tradition) and finally, we can end the session with any one of 9 relaxation/concentration practices.

I am interested in finding how many combinations (a selection of practices from a list of available practices). When we simplify the term combination, we use word choose, i.e  $\binom{9}{1}$  would be read as "9 items, choose 1". I like the idea of choosing as it implies, in this context, a sense of awareness and conscious action. The math would look like this:

$$\begin{aligned} & \binom{10}{1} \times [2^3] \times \left[ \binom{9}{1} \times [2^9 - 1] \right] \times \binom{9}{1} \times \binom{9}{1} \\ & = 10 \times 8 \times [9 \times (519 - 1)] \times 9 \times 9 \\ & = 30,209,760 \end{aligned}$$

Therefore, there are 30,209,760 ways to combine a sequence of Asanas, Kriyas, Pranayamas and relaxation techniques (actually, many thousand times more than this). If we were to average 50 years of Yoga Sadhana in a lifetime, 365 days a year, this would amount to 18,250 sessions. Given the number of different combinations, it would take us 1,655.3 lifetimes to experience each one of these combinations! As daunting as this is, multiply this many times as I did not even take into account variations within each practice, nor variations within your own Koshas (physical, mental or emotional bodies).

Again, Yoga is not quantitative, it is experiential and qualitative, but numbers can help understand why one might feel overwhelmed with the sheer number of practices in the Gitananda tradition. As Swamiji has often said, everything is there for right-use-ness and math is a wonderful tool to give us some perspective.

This math exploration underlines that the path to mastery cannot be trying all the combinations of these practices (as it would take thousands of lifetimes to experience each) but to practice mindfully and with awareness. But being, at times, a little intimidated by the vastness of this tradition is quite a normal reaction. The response we would like to cultivate is a Step-by-Step approach.

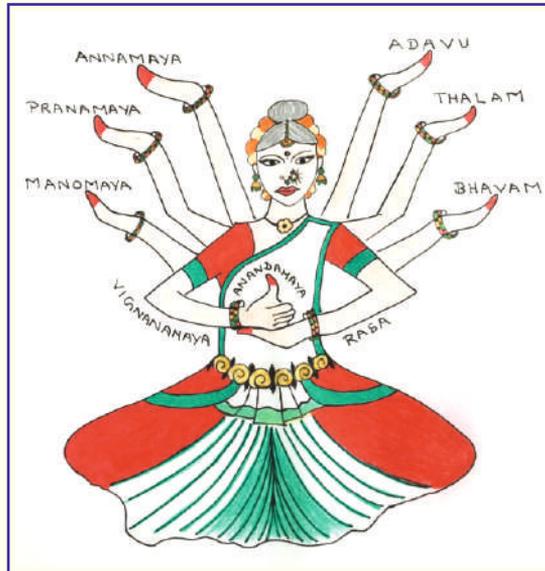
## IN CONVERSATION WITH YOGA AND NATYAM

VIDHYA KOMADI, Member of Team 52, UK.

Bharatnatyam as in Bha (Bhavam) -Ra (Ragam) - Ta (Thalam) -Natyam (Dance) is a classical art that requires a lot of shraddha and guru bhakthi. After almost 3 decades of my life, I am now a Yognatian. The last 3 months have slipped by very quickly and the revelations I have had ever since I joined the online Bharatanatyam class has been amazing.

Learning from a great Guru Smt. Devasena Bhavanani is a blessing in disguise. Miss silently works in the background sowing the seeds of life skills to all her students. She embraces her students with love and all her classes have a healing energy. At first I mistook it as the energy of the art but later realized that it was the Guru's energy and the selfless giving attitude that created the healing energy. Through her I have come to realize that one need not always be in the limelight to manifest one's Dharma.

I have also understood that Bharatanatyam is a form of yogathat helps to align the Pancha Koshas and bridges the gap between the body, mind and the soul. It is a spiritual journey that combines the "Adavus" (dance movements), Thalam (Rhythm or beat using which an adavu is performed), Bhavam (Expressions), Rasa (Sentiments) and Slokas (Mantras).



**Adavus align the Annamaya Kosha:** By performing the adavus, we start working with our physical body to create the energy of various geometrical figures. In stretching, bending, turning and twisting, I realize that I am correcting the Annamaya Kosha with the healing energy of the shapes. Difficulties or pain when performing signal the presence of energy blocks within the body. But as Ammaji has told, Repeat, Rhythm and Regularity helps to streamline the energy flow within the body so the adavus can be mastered creating oneness between the body and the soul.

**Thalam aligns the Pranamaya Kosha:** We are not just taught the dance movements; every student is also trained to understand 'Thalam', a form of Nadam or the sound. Every Adavu is performed using a unique thalam in 3 varying speeds. In practicing the thalam in all 3 speeds, I am learning to take control of my breath. One cannot master the thalam in the correct speed and rhythm without proper breath control.

**Slokas and Mudras align Manomaya Kosha:** The biggest challenge comes with controlling our thoughts and emotions. I mostly tend to restrict or outpour. Bharatham helps to strike a balance in the bhavas (expressions and moods) in the form of Mantra Yoga with the slokas and mudras. Slokas create a pranic shield and helps to express myself in a positive way. Observing my Guru, I have realized that the right way of learning a sloka or a mudra is to become one ourselves.

**Rasa and Vignanamaya Kosha:** As we move inwards tuning the body, breath, mind and emotions, we reach the peak of true Rasa (the essence of a mood or expression) experiencing a sense of withdrawal from the outside world, the physical identity and manifest the energy of the higher consciousness. I pray that one day I manifest the true Rasa with purity, wisdom and intuition.

**Anandamaya Kosha:** In becoming Bharatham, a divine experience is created for both the performer and the spectators. At that point there is no duality but oneness. Everything within and around becomes Shiva Mayam for everyone.

I recall the days when I used to converse with Yoga asking questions on how to truly understand and embrace it. As I write my experience, I realize that I have been conversing with Ammaji (Yoga) looking at her pictures in YSS book asking for help subconsciously. And, Ammaji has been silently helping me to experience the true bliss of Yoga through Bharatanatyam. Today with her grace and blessings, I am a proud student of a great Guru Smt. Devasena Bhavanani who is silently training and changing the lives of many students.

My sincere gratitude and thanks to the entire Guru Parampara.

## BHAVANA: THE YOGIC ART OF BEING

Ammaji Yogacharini MEENAKSHI DEVI BHAVANANI,  
Director, ICYER and Yoganjali Natyalayam, Pondicherry.

*Editor's note: This article by Ammaji has appeared in many places earlier but is being reprinted here to reach many of the newcomers to the Gitananda Yoga family. Michael McCann who is assisting Dr Ananda in compiling and editing Yoga Life every month wisely commented, 'Such natural wisdom in this beautiful article. Ammaji has the eyes of the seer, the poet's eyes, that sees the universe in a grain of sand, or draws a Darshan from a humble fly'. May Ammaji's vision continue to inspire all of us to manifest that Divinity that lies within all of us in a potential form.*

**The Rishis have taught us that not only we are what we think, but also, the world is as we think it to be! Attitude is all! An essential skill in the art of Yoga is the ability to create the appropriate 'Bhavana', State of Mind, towards everything, which happens to us.** I myself learned an important lesson in the science of constructing positive attitudes from a very lowly creature - a fly!

While drinking a glass of fresh orange juice, something small and black swimming in the bright yellow juice caught my eye. It was a fly! I threw the juice quickly to the ground, spitting the rest out in horror. How close I had come to swallowing a fly!

Then I mused, what if I had not noticed that fly in time? What if I had indeed simply drunk it down, never knowing that I had consumed the insect? It wouldn't have made a bit of difference to my body. My digestive juices would have taken care of it, along with the orange juice, and I would not have been the wiser! Yet, what horror and revulsion I suffered when I saw it!

This ordinary incident was a major realization for me. I became fully aware of the incredible power our thoughts and consequent attitudes (Bhavanas) have to alter and affect our conscious reality: **the awful difference between the objective event and what we think of the event, or our reaction to that event!**

**Dr. Victor Frankel**, an Austrian Psychoanalyst, discovered his famous psychiatric treatment now known as **LOGOTHERAPY** while interred in a German Concentration Camp during World War II. It was there, in a place where most lived in despair and suffering, that he underwent a spiritual transformation which illuminated his Inner Life. Deprived of all he owned, separated from his loved ones, imprisoned, he discovered a freedom which no one, not even the worst dictator, could take away. He discovered that 'the only ultimate freedom' that any human

being could possess was **'the freedom to choose his own attitude'**. This discovery, which preserved his physical and emotional health during a time of great stress, later became the corner-stone of his famous psychological therapy.

### ADHI VYADHI: MIND OVER MATTER

Like most Western so-called 'modern discoveries', this philosophical and psychological fact had been known and utilized for untold millennia by Hindu thinkers. **Adhi Vyadhi**, the **'Principle of the Power of Mind over the Material Reality'**, was taught by the **Rishi Vashishta** to his young disciple, the Yuvaraja, **Lord Rama**, and has since been extolled by enlightened men through generations to their disciples in India.

In my own case, the near swallowing of the fly brought me to the same realisations as Dr. Victor Frankel, Rishi Vashistha and Lord Rama, though in a much more humble and mundane way. **I fully and clearly realised at that moment that what happens to us is not so important as what we 'think' of what happens to us! In other words, our attitude towards the event is the determining factor of our Karma.** Subconsciously, this realization had been brewing for a long time. My mother was my first object lesson. Her joy at picking and eating the first red-ripe tomato of her garden each season could not have been greater had my father presented her with a diamond ring or gold necklace! She took such delight in the changing seasons, the coloured leaves of autumn or the first snow-flake of the winter. The objects which gave her intense joy were small and common, but her delight was great. I realised then, partially, that living in a palace, wearing silks and jewels, even being Queen of the World, could not have produced a greater joy in her consciousness, than the first snowflake, or the taste of that first red-ripe tomato. **It was the internal state itself, which was important, not that which produced it!**

### ALL EVENTS ARE MULTI-DIMENSIONAL

In that same line of thought, I realised that every event is multi-dimensional in this interrelated world of phenomena. A man walks along a jungle path. A tiger eats him up. Good Karma for the tiger, but bad Karma for the man! In the **Universal Scheme**, one being's pleasure often produces another being's pain. One being's life may demand another being's death. We cannot change the Universal Scheme of things, but we can change our attitude towards it. It is told in the **JATAKA TALES** that the Buddha in one incarnation, while walking through a forest, came upon a mother tiger starving with her two cubs. In a gesture of **Divine Compassion**, he sat

in Padma Asana, and offered his body to the tigress as food for her and her cubs, which she accepted. What a difference between the Buddha's attitude and the ordinary man who is eaten by a tiger!

**It is even taught by our Yoga Rishis that one can change one's Karma by one's own reaction, one's attitude or Bhavana to it.** Witness the story of the devotee who approached the Guru and asked him how many rebirths he would have to suffer before he would be free of the **Samsaric Cycle**. The Guru said, 'You have only ten re-births left, my son'. The man walked away dejected that he would have to go through so many more bodies. Soon another man came. 'Beloved Teacher', he said, 'Please tell me how many births I will have before attaining **Moksha**'. 'My son', said the Guru, 'You will have to be born 10,000 more times'. 'Only 10,000 more births!' The man replied in ecstasy. He danced and shouted for joy. 'Only 10,000 more births!' And at that very moment he became enlightened! All true spiritual freedom lies in one's attitude towards the event, the position that the mind takes. **Perhaps the event cannot be changed but one's attitude can be changed. The attitude, the Bhavana, is surely under the control of the conscious will. Even though Karma comes back in its circular manner, sometimes that very 'change of attitude' has the power to even 'alter' the event.**

'What shall we do? Where shall we go?' a disciple of the Guru once complained to the Master. 'In summer it is so hot. In winter it is too cold'. The Guru smiled and replied, 'Go someplace where it is neither hot nor cold'. Where can that place be? Only in the mind, which simply accepts hot as hot, and cold as cold and does not react to it, calling it pleasure or pain, liking it or disliking it.

## DIFFERENT LEVELS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Human beings, like fish in water, live in different levels of consciousness. Though ten people are outwardly passing through the same experience, they may in actual fact, be having ten completely different experiences according to their conditioning and their attitudes! I have toured South Indian temples thousands of years old, relishing in ecstasy the most mind-boggling vibrations, viewing the most exquisite sculptures. Travelling with my students, I marvelled at the fabulous temple architecture, the music and the dance, the lush green rice paddies, the graceful village women carrying brass pots on their heads which shimmered beautifully in the rays of a rising sun. Yet I have often found to my dismay that I was on a 'solo' tour! My companions had a completely different experience. They suffered terrible heat, were bitten by thousands of ferocious South Indian

mosquitoes, burnt their tongues with the hot spiced food and were revolted by the dirt they saw everywhere! They saw little of what I had seen, had felt little of the emotions which I had felt! Their attitudes and my attitude were galaxies apart. **The external experiences were the same, but the internal reactions to those experiences were vastly different.**

Another instance of the power of the mental attitude or Bhavana comes to mind. In Malaga, Spain, I went daily to the market to shop for Ashram provisions. I passed a young girl, who always sat next to a soft ice cream machine. She was there if I passed at 8 a.m. in the morning, and she was there when I returned at noon. If I happened to venture out in the late afternoon, I saw her there, talking and joking with her customers. I marvelled at her cheerful disposition in such a boring occupation. I laughed to myself that she was a 'prisoner of that ice cream machine.' She couldn't move from that spot, for a customer might come, wanting ice cream. She might as well have been chained to it! Indeed, what, I thought, if she had been condemned as a punishment to sit day after day by that ice cream machine, chained by a leg to its base. She would have suffered extreme mental torture and after a few weeks, might even have gone mad. But because she had chosen to do this job, for her livelihood, day after day, of her own free will, she did it willingly, even cheerfully, laughing and joking with those who passed by, month after month. **Her life was liveable because of her attitude towards her situation.**

### LIVING IN THE PRESENT

The human mind also has a very bad habit of clinging to past experiences and allowing them to colour its attitude towards the present. The mind, like a hungry dog with a bone, loves to chew over and over again, the same past experience, suffering anew if the experience was painful, enjoying afresh if the experience contained pleasure. A Zen story illustrates this human tendency. Two monks were walking down the road when they came to a young girl, standing by the side of a raging river. The girl was frightened of the river but had to cross it to reach her home on the opposite side. The older monk picked the young girl up, hoisted her on his back, and carried her to the other bank. The two monks then resumed their walk along the path. After half an hour, the younger monk could no longer contain himself. 'You know that it is forbidden for us to even go near young and beautiful girls. Yet you picked that one up and took her to the other side'. The older monk laughed and said, 'I left that girl at the river side. Are you still carrying her?'

The great Guru **Swami Gitananda** often told another story that illustrates the power of Bhavana. One morning as he was walking down the street, he met a friend who was terribly unhappy and depressed. 'What's the matter, Ram?' he asked. The man wept. 'My wife has just died. Woe is me! Who will look after me! Who will cook my dosas and wash my clothes? What shall I ever do! My wife is dead!' Swamiji consoled the man as best he could and sent him on his way. A little farther down the street Swamiji met another friend, Krishnamurthi, who was walking with joyful steps down the road. 'Namaskar!' Krishnamurthi greeted him with a smile, 'How are you, Swamiji? I am so happy to see you!' 'I am well. And you look very happy indeed.' 'I am very happy today, Swamiji. Let me tell you why. My wife has just died.' 'Your wife has just died?' Swamiji replied, somewhat shocked by his friend's behaviour. 'Yes', little Krishnamurthi replied. 'She has gone to the Lotus Feet of her Lord at last. She suffered so much these last few years from incurable disease. She was a good wife. She has served me and the children well. She has lived a good life. And now she is free.' And with these words, he went on his way. The external event was the same, the death of the wife. But in that death, the one man could only think of himself and his own misery caused by the loss of his helpmate. The other man, taking a positive attitude, realized the blessings of death in the circumstances and faced his life cheerfully despite the tragedy.

Because fasting is an essential part of Yoga practice in our Ashram we often go without food for days. In fact, I have gone on twenty-one-day fasts. During those fasts I have experienced the great joy and spiritual exhilaration brought about by such a Tapas. Fear of being without food and dying is heard in the voices of beggars here in India daily. For those who do not eat by choice, fasting can still bring such fears. That is why our bhavana, our attitude is so important.

## HATHA YOGA AND BHAVANA

Hatha Yoga provides an important method for cultivating a personality capable of choosing the right attitude to take in any given situation. How can this be so? Let me explain! The English word 'attitude' according to the dictionary, means 'the position of the body' or 'state of mind .... regarding some matter'. Funk and Wagnalls 'Standard College Dictionary' further explains: 'Attitude... is a synonym of 'position'... which means location or orientation in space.... It also means a chosen point of view or opinion.' Attitude is thus closely related to 'position of the body', for the way we hold our body also indicates our attitude or state of mind. In Sanskrit, the word 'Asana' springs from the root 'Asi' or 'to be'. **'Asana' then also**

reflects a 'state of being'. Asana in modern Yogic contexts has come to indicate merely a gymnastic contortion of the body. **But, in essence, Asana also means 'attitude' or 'Bhavana' or 'state of being'. 'Asana' reflects the 'Bhavana', and also can produce the 'Bhavana'. Thus, it logically follows that we may use Asanas consciously, to help construct positive attitudes, or Bhavanas. The 'Asana' helps us to 'choose' the 'correct point of view or position of both mind and body' towards every situation in our life.** In Hatha Yoga, every possible position of which the human body is capable is explored: the body is turned upside down, bent forward, bent backward, balanced on one leg, on the hands, on the tail bone etc. The body poses are numerous, and the body is made flexible, capable of assuming any position the mind requires. Since body positions reflect attitude or Bhavana, a flexible body will aid in cultivating a flexible mind, one which is capable of seeing a situation from all possible angles, and then, consciously choosing the best possible position to take in regard to it! **Thus Bhavana, Attitude and Asana are intimately related, each dramatically affecting the other!**

### THE FREEDOM ONLY TO CHOOSE ONE'S ATTITUDE

Westerners critical of the Hindu cultural pattern and its rigid system of expectations and roles lose sight of the importance of one's mental attitude in bringing about spiritual peace and joy. The Western mind constantly seeks an external paradise (either here or in the hereafter) wherein it can be happy, whereas the Eastern mind, blessed by a wiser tradition, knows that Paradise lies solely within the mind. In fact, the very rigidity of the Hindu system fosters positive attitudes. For example, the Hindu attitude towards marriage has produced strong family stability. Marriages are forever in traditional Hindu culture, literally 'till death do the couple part.' If one knows that one must live with one's spouse the rest of one's life, and that there is no alternative, certainly one's attitude towards him or her will be much different, than if one knows that one can easily leave him or her any moment, for any reason whatsoever!

If one exists in a structure which cannot be changed, even if the resultant situation is intolerable, then one must either change one's attitude or die or go insane or run away. There is a beautiful prayer to this effect: 'Lord, grant me the strength to change that which can be changed, the patience to accept that which cannot be changed, and the wisdom to know the difference!' This was the great prayer which Victor Frankel learned during his years in a concentration camp. This, of course, also requires great faith in the Universe and wisdom enough to perceive the situation

accurately. One must believe, or know, that every situation into which one is placed is exactly the situation needed for one's growth, for one's further evolution. In **Patanjali's** system of Yoga, this Bhavana or attitude is the fifth Niyama and is called **Ishwar Pranidhana**, or submission to the will of the Lord, accepting all conditions as a **Prasadam** from God. That is the essence of the Yogic attitude towards life. That is also the essence of Christ's '**Be-attitude**', or the **Correct Attitude towards Being**. Every event, every relationship, every situation, pleasant or unpleasant, becomes a means through which one can evolve, through which one can grow spiritually. When one is over the 'hump' of seeking for external paradises, of seeking a place to rest which is neither too hot nor too cold, when one realizes that that ideal place exists only in his own mind and in a positive attitude towards the Universe, then one is walking firmly on the Spiritual Path. One understands that heaven (or hell) lies within our own minds.

**Golda Meir**, the former Prime Minister of Israel, was once asked the secret of the immense power of her small nation's survival under such hostile conditions. She thought for a few moments and then said simply, 'Our strength stems from the fact that we have no alternative'. Indeed, when one has no alternative, anything is possible. When one allows oneself no excuses, one can achieve the impossible. When in an impossible situation, when in a corner backed to the wall, when there is no escape, it is then and there that the positive attitude can change a coward to a hero, a weakling to a man of strength, and failure to success.

I am always grateful that on that day I didn't swallow that fly. Not that it would have made any difference to my vegetarian body. Surely that little insect could have been easily digested and I, none the wiser. But that incident with the little fly became the culmination point in a chain of thinking that had begun long before in childhood musings. It was the straw that broke the back of a false conditioning and in a single stroke, I found myself freed into a realm of consciousness in which every experience was welcomed as another opportunity for evolution. Cold or hot, pleasant or unpleasant, success or failure-all this became totally irrelevant. **It was that lowly fly which taught me the true meaning of the Beatitudes - and gave me the correct Bhavana, the Yogic Attitude, towards Being.**

**LOVING MESSAGES FOR AMMAJI FROM OUR  
RISHICULTURE GITANANDA YOGA FAMILY WORLDWIDE**

Dear Ammaji

Your wise words of wisdom ring through my ears  
Regardless of the seas and oceans we travel across.  
Images of your face stand out in my mind so vividly  
Despite the time lapse since our paths did cross.  
Take the middle path of Yoga to harness a balanced viewpoint  
And cultivate love and the right attitudes for spiritual evolution.  
Connect to higher wisdom residing within, your inner kingdom  
Free of mental, emotional and physical pollution.  
You guide and lead by example, from the front of the pack  
Always strong and agile like a powerful lioness  
Often gently encouraging her cubs so eloquently  
To follow the Yamas like ahimsa - nonviolence.  
Your wise words of wisdom ring through my ears  
Regardless of the seas and oceans to travel across.  
Often reminding us to show our Egos who's the boss,  
Challenging ourselves to rise up like a wandering albatross.  
Om Shanti Shanti Shanti,  
Always sending you love and respect,

~ Yogacharini Gargi, Mentor Gitananda Yoga, New Zealand.



Sending gratitude and love to Ammaji. The more we learn and experience the precious teachings that Swamiji, Ammaji and Dr. Anandaji have made so accessible to us, the greater appreciation we have for Ammaji's many essential roles. **Although we have not been with her in-person, her Darshan has reached us.** The quality of her extensive works shines through the written pages of the many books, the YSS lessons, the issues of Yoga Life, the pictures of the smiling young Yoganjali Natalayam students and her leadership of this great Parampara.

Our thanks to Rishipatni Ammaji.

~ Yogacharya Sri Bharata and Denise Barry, Team 52, USA.

Dearest Divine Ammaji,

Greetings on your 78<sup>th</sup> Birthday. My wife and I send our best wishes for this occasion. I have very fond memories of being at ICYER for your 70<sup>th</sup> celebrations – My, how the years roll by.

And through the years, your guidance and influence always has been felt – be it through your books, your essays in Yoga Life, letters, the amazing boundless teachings of Dr Ananda, and of course the most precious – the rare opportunity to sit at your feet those few times and hear you speak in person. I feel it is a great honour and privilege to have done so and I appreciate it more and more as time goes on.

Happy Birthday! Long may you guide us.

~ **Yogasadhaka Selwyn Williams, Member Team 52, Paraparaumu, New Zealand**



Pranam Guruji,

Wishing dearest Ammaji a wonderful 78th birthday. What a privilege it has been to be part of the Gitananda family and enjoy the loving insights of dear Ammaji.

Thank you for sharing Ammaji, your presence with us.

I may have met you just a year ago, yet the bond felt through the words and insights is so strong that I can feel Ammaji's energy and presence around.

I wish and pray for her health and happiness always.

Sending my humble wishes and prayers with love,

~ **Mitchelle Matharu, Member Team 52, USA**



O Amma, you are love, you are light  
 you are not just perfect, but perfection personified  
 you lead by example,  
 you live an intelligent life,  
 you are not just any Nari, but Bharatiya personified  
 a yogini of the modern times  
 whose Atma is traveling from many lifetimes  
 an old Rishika in a new body  
 you are Yoga personified.

~ **Yoga Sadhaki Neeru Prashar, Member Team 52, Canada.**

Aum, Ananda Balayogi and dedicated Yoga-residents, ICYER-YOGNAT-Ananda Ashram, Vedapuri, South India.

I have just seen the video with the Yoga-Vedic puja. It is the best gift/ offering/ dev-danam given, as spiritually the divine sounds in healthy rhythms with the divine words of light-melodies, do resonate into all the Pancha-Koshas, always positively, aum.

Only with in depth knowledge + wisdoms/satya vidhya + buddhi from the truthful divine light-heritages, do give the real strength/satya balam, to make these practical in healthy + healing manifestations on earth, ayurvedam prakriti aum.

The struggles in life, which are an inevitable part of/for every soul to deal with + to transform these in this life-time into true wisdoms, become then a source of trustful insights to live/ vas shraddha satya darshanam aum.

A lot of practical works have to be done and this was also seen in the 78th celebration-moment for dear Meenakshi Deviji aum.

Good works resonate good insights aum (shallowness + ego-emptiness powers can never bring; healthy-healing prosperity expressions)

May you all continue with Swamiji's true yoga-light-wisdoms and to make these practical manifest; in honour of the divine source; the eternal life/nitya jyotir sajiva, aum.

A greeting of light,

~ Yogacharini Bharathi Devi Giri, Divine Peace Foundation, Netherlands.



Ammaji's 78th birthday was 'spectacular' as she mentions this in her conversation with her son and successor of this great lineage, Dr Ananda. One of the most culturally rich and traditionally inspiring, is the **Guru-Shishya Parampara of the Gitananda** traditional practices of Ashtanga Yoga. Ammaji's charismatic appearance is reflected in every phase of life since she joined Swami Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj on this great path of Yoga. Ammaji's standpoint on wisdom, the intellect, the power to choose/discern, is so important every now and then in life. She herself embarked this journey by choosing herself as a present to present as a **Guru-Dakshina** to Swami Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj's teachings of Yoga. Ammaji's love of living Yoga is a well taught, highly educated, skillfully practised,

and profound experience of culturally appropriate and traditionally diversified yoga at international and global parlance. Ammaji's book on History of Yoga is a true masterpiece of her gratitude and love towards the roots and heritage of the great Indian soil and its traditional values. The purposeful and meaningful tales and short stories are a magnificent series of drama, art, culture, and Carnatic music in the Yoganjali Natyalayam. Ammaji's classical dancing, her motivational inner strength to young children and youth of all age groups through the platform of the yoga is a big milestone in this tradition of yoga. **Ammaji's definition of the word TEAM as Together Everyone Achieves More! Is remarkable.** So much to learn, so much to share, so much to give can be learned and practiced under the teachings of this Parampara given by the structured representation to these teachings dedicatedly representing the śraddhā-vīrya-smrtisamādhi-prajñā-pūrvakaitareām (Yoga Sutra of Maharishi Patanjali 1.20) of Ammaji's heart and soul.

Thank you and all the best wishes to you Ammaji.

~ Yogasadhaki Gurleen Sarai, Member TEAM 52, Canada.



I have not yet met Ammaji in person. When I did the Step-by-Step course a few years ago, I met Ammaji through her letters and through the Yoga Life magazine. Her astounding wisdom, wit, humour and sharp mind continues to stimulate, encourage, reprimand and challenge me.

“We first need to become aware of how unaware we are!

The 3 R's: Rhythm. Regularity. Repetition.

Remember to remember.

Keep on keeping on and don't stop till the goal is reached!

Yoga is about being a good human being.

Creating a beauty that hasn't existed before.

I can. I will. I am able.

Swadhyaya- the Yogic selfie.

Exercise to exorcise.”

These pearls of wisdom from Ammaji, each of them in turn as I came across them since I enrolled for the Step-by-Step course, stopped me in my tracks, in a manner of speaking; made me think, reevaluate, contemplate what they could

mean. They serve to encourage me through the trials and tribulation of growing from a human doing into a human, humane being.

**“I am a work in progress”, to quote Ammaji once again. May I always be worthy of such wisdom and love! May I grow in Yoga and grow in gratitude and love! Thank you, thank you, thank you, dear Ammaji, for everything you do for me and mean to me!!**

~ Yoga Sadhaki Alet Ferreira-Brazelle, Gitananda Yoga, South Africa

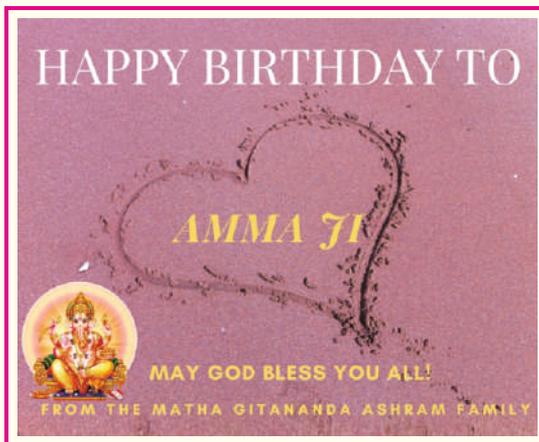
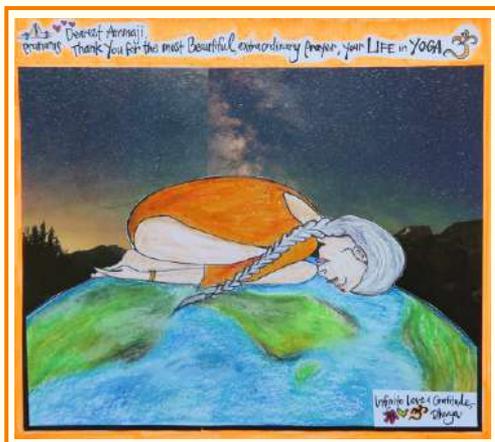


Unfortunately, I have not met Ammaji in person yet. But of course, I have a very nice impression of her, as I have been connected with your Gitananda family for almost a year. When I hear how many people's hearts, lives and souls Ammaji has touched, I feel sad that I have not been able to be connected to her.

Our dear Dr. Ananda's talk as part of **Scintillating Saturdays** recently on Ammaji's significance as **Matru Deva Bhava** added to the impression of Ammaji's greatness. I told Dhivya in an email that she was lucky to have such a fantastic grandmother: Ammaji seems incredibly strong, wise, dedicated, smart, caring, knowledgeable, and loving! A real yogini and female guru leader for us to be inspired by.

I wish to convey my greetings and love for her!

~ Professor Ingunn Hagen, Member team 52, Norway



**OUR BELOVED AMMAJI – THE LIGHT OF OUR WORLD**  
Yogachemmal REENA JOSEPH and Yogachemmal G DAYANIDY,  
Faculty Members YOGNAT

In every phase of our life from an individual to a family, Ammaji has been our guiding light, she has been a mother to our entire family. In 2003, when I was 17, my first residential intensive Summer Camp at ICYER was the very first time I got to interact with Ammaji. She had asked us what we had seen at the beach. I told her “the crows were picking up dry fish and flying off, taking one or two pecks and dropping them off and going for the next one”. She asked us, “What did you learn from that?” We all had no answers. Ammaji explained to us about the greed the crow had was the reason why it was never happy even though it had plenty of food to eat, going on chasing for the next one. **Contentment as the key for a happy life was the first lesson I learned from Ammaji.** Transformation started there.

Until that point of my life, I had never had a vision of my own self, of who I am, and what it is to be human. The concepts of 'I the Ahamkara' to 'We the TEAM', the animal and human brain, the '3Rs: Regularity, Rhythm and Repetition, Five-Fold Awareness, the Kleshas-Avidya-Ignorance, the Shat Ripus... etc., given to us by Ammaji during each class was the foundation for transforming us into better beings. She was moulding us, masses of unmolded clay, so that we could manifest our destiny in the World out there, and the Spiritual World beyond that.

**Ammaji means magic!** I was lucky enough to witness the magic, the life she brings into all our dance dramas. All our dance dramas have been successful with that magical touch of hers. Yoga, classical dance and classical music were the magic tools Ammaji used to make the ordinary - extraordinary. **She is a manifestation of Goddess Saraswathi herself in disguise.**

Ammaji has been with us through the toughest times of my life. When my father passed away, she was there comforting me, giving me the push to move on and do my Dharma. The toughest part of my lifetime was our wedding. Both Daya and I, belonging to different religions, carry unforgettable nightmares of trying to bring both our families together for the wedding. Many close loved ones had abandoned us by then. Ammaji and Dr Sir trusted and supported us. Despite all the hatred flowing towards them for supporting us, Ammaji not only helped us cross the storm but made our wedding a Grand Event with music, dance and Yoga filling the whole marriage hall. What a Punyam for this lifetime to have the Guru's trust and support, even though they knew a few other loved students would leave them.

**To experience unconditional love is very rare and I am proud to say that we have a 'Family of Love'.**

Twelve years later, Ammaji still holds us together. She had every time been pushing us to do our Dharma. She comforts us when we are low, and her love and hugs have been our energy booster. Every good moment of our life has always begun from her feet only. Every auspicious day or important event, people wish to walk into the shrine to get blessings of the Gods and Goddess. **For us, every time we walk into ICYER, we are blessed to receive blessings from our 'Living Gods', Ammaji and Dr. Sir.**

The guiltiest moments of my life were when we had COVID last September and couldn't be near to help her when she fell down with her stroke. However, later when she was hospitalised I had the fortune to stay with her, and whenever I would sign the hospital papers **as her daughter**, I had only one prayer to the Almighty, **'We want Ammaji back'**. Even if you switch a few of our lifetimes from us, for she has transformed our lives, and there are so many who need her. One year has turned everything upside down, made it so different, but still Ammaji and her perseverance, her indomitable will- power has not changed. When we were back from the hospital, on seeing pictures shared by many students of Ammaji kissing them, I told Ammaji, "When you are back sitting in the Satsangha Hall, I too want to have your Divine Kiss". I was so happy that this finally happened when Ammaji came to the hall for her 78th birthday Homam.

She gives me a learning experience each time I see her. Every time she emphasizes doing the right thing, Recently, when I was feeling very disheartened, she gave me the message I needed right at that time **'Do what you have to do!'** I feel this lifetime as my greatest blessing because God has put us in the right place, with the right person, to become someone who is useful for the world. If we had not joined YOGNAT, if Ammaji had not come into our lives, we would have just been a useless and a worthless piece of garbage.

Ammaji has made this transformation in many of our lives. A few stand closer here as witnesses and many out there are living their lives out in their own world with unexpressed silence thanks to our beloved Ammaji. **Ammaji lives in each one of our good deeds because she has installed Goodness to counteract and negate all our Samskara-Vasana-Karma baggage.**

**Ammaji, for all our lifetimes we will be grateful for all the love, support and guidance you have given us enabling us to walk towards light from darkness.**



