

PARMARTH NIKETAN ASHRAM

INTERNATIONAL YOGA FESTIVAL 2008

This newsletter brings to you the events at Parmarth Niketan Ashram, Rishikesh (Himalayas), India, the divine seva activities of the ashram, the world travels of its President and Spiritual Head, His Holiness Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji, and also of the Foundation headed by Pujya Swamiji, India Heritage Research Foundation.

Please note all photographs from International Yoga Festival are available on <http://picasaweb.google.co.uk/sadhvibhagawati> .
There are over 1000 pictures divided into different albums, all available for download.



Inauguration



Stage of Inaugural Function, at Parmarth Niketan, in the holy waters of Mother Ganga

The annual International Yoga Festival, organized jointly by the Uttarakhand Tourism and Parmarth Niketan Ashram in Rishikesh, in association with Patanjali Yog Peeth and Shantikunj Ashram, Haridwar was inaugurated on March 1, 2008 in a huge ceremony performed by the hands of the Honorable Chief Minister.

The annual International Yoga Festival has been organized at Parmarth Niketan ashram since 1999. It continues to grow and expand every year. This year's festival was the largest festival yet, including over 500 delegates from 32 countries across the world, including Australia, Canada, China, France, Germany, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, Romania, Singapore, South Korea, Spain, Switzerland, Thailand, UK and USA and many more.



Pujya Swamiji lights the inaugural lamp with the Hon. Chief Minister, Hon. Tourism Minister and Pujya Acharya Balkrishanji



Special Souvenir prepared by Patanjali Yog Peeth is released



Participants watch the opening ceremony



Pujya Swamiji gives His opening blessings

During the one week festival, the participants imbibed the nectar of: Kundalini Yoga, Iyengar Yoga, Meditation, pranayama, kriya yoga, yoga nidra, nada yoga, reiki and more. Further, there were special cultural events organized by Uttarakhand Tourism each evening.

The participants were also blessed with the presence, satsang and divine words of revered saints and spiritual masters, including:

H.H. Sri Shankaracharyaji
Swami Divyanand Teerthji,
H.H. Swami Yoganandaji

H.H. Swami Ramdevji,
H.H. Swami Vishwanandaji

H.H. Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji
H.H. Sadhvi Suhradji (Premben)
H.H. Swami Shankaranand Tilakji

The yogacharyas were as follows:

Dr. David Frawley
Shri Birjoo Mehta
Hikaru Hashimoto
Bhavini Kalan

Gurmukh Kaur Khalsa
Sadhvi Abha Saraswati
Sadhvi Bhagwati Saraswati

Duncan Peak
Saul David Raye
Janet Attwood
Rohini Khatri



Inspiring Discourses

In addition to the wide range of classes in asana, pranayama, meditation and more, the participants also benefitted from inspiring, uplifting and beautiful discourses from revered saints, spiritual masters, teachers and scholarly experts.





The “discourses” ranged from soul stirring, enlightening messages from the saints to intellectually stimulating presentation of yogic research to bhakti filled song and dance!!!

Talks and question-answer satsangs were given by H.H. Pujya Swami Divyanand Teerth, Shankaracharya Bhanpura Peeth, H.H. Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswati and H.H. Pujya Swami Vishwananda. Yoga is not merely for our bodies, Pujya Swamiji explained to the hundreds of participants, but rather yoga is for our bodies, minds, hearts and souls. [Click here to read Pujya Swamiji’s full, enlightening article on the 8 Limbs of Yoga and how they apply to our lives whether we consider ourselves yoga students or not.](#)

H.H. Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswati also gave a special talk on the holy day of Maha Shivratri in which He explained the true meaning of the holiday (holy-day). Later that evening, a special campfire and meditation was held in which participants were able to “give” to the divine fire any obstacles thwarting them in their spiritual progress. To hear Pujya Swamiji’s talk on Mahashivratri [click here](#) .

Discourses were also given by Sadhvi Suhrad (Premben) on the importance of the Guru, Dr. David Frawley on Yoga, Ayurveda and Vedanta, Sadhvi Bhagwati on the path to true happiness and Drs. Shirley Telles and Naveen of Patanjali Yog Peeth who shared the latest research in yogic studies.



Ganga Aarti

Yoga means union. It is union of the breath to the body, of the mind to the muscles and of the self to the Divine. During the day, the participants received classes in asana, pranayama, meditation and so much more. However, according to Patanjali's 8 limbs of yoga, the 8th limb, the highest branch is Samadhi - divine, blissful union with God. Through the classes and the teachings we were able to teach the first 7 limbs - yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana and dhyana. However, the 8th limb of samadhi was possible only through attaining that divine union!





The easiest place for that is the evening Ganga Aarti. We gathered together each evening (as we always do at Parmarth Niketan) for the divine Ganga yagna and aarti ceremony, a time filled with prayer, with meditation, with song and with divine communion. To view the divine Ganga Aarti personally, please [click here](#)

The participants - from every corner of the globe, from every religion and culture, from every walk of life — all found the aarti to be a time which was so spiritually uplifting and rejuvenating. To see the meaning of aarti and yagna please [click here](#)



Concluding Ceremony

The concluding ceremony on the 7th March was an event filled with the presence of divine saints, numerous dignitaries, beautiful yoga demonstrations and, of course, divine Ganga Aarti. The event was graced by the presence of His Excellency the Governor of Uttarakhand, Shri BL Joshi H.H. Puja Swami Ramdev, H.H. Puja Swami Chidanand Saraswati, H.H. M.M. Puja Swami Asanganand Saraswati, H.H. Puja Swami Chinmayanand Saraswati, and H.H. Puja Swami Yogananda, as well as the Tourism Secretary, Shri Rakesh Sharma and Shri Indu Kumar Pandey Additional Chief Secretary.



The special lamp is lit by (left to right): Puja Swami Chidanandji, Puja Swami Ramdevji, Hon'ble Governor, Puja Swami Yoganandaji, Puja Swami Chinmayanandji, Hon'ble Lady Governor





Pujya Swamij with Pujya Swami Ramdevji and the Honorable Governor



Pujya Swamij puts tilak on Pujya Swami Ramdevji



Pujya Sadhvi Suhradji with the other sisters



Divine Ganga Aarti





A special occasion was that Pujya Swami Ramdevji came especially for this event and gave a beautiful talk as well as short pranayama demonstration.

The Concluding ceremony included inspiring talks from Pujya Swami Chidanandji, Pujya Swami Ramdevji, Pujya Swami Chinmayanandji and His Excellency the Honorable Governor, Shri BL Joshiji as well as representatives from Uttarakhand Tourism and Government, including the Respected Secretary Tourism, Shri Rakesh Sharma and Shri InduKumar Pandey, Additional Chief Secretary

Further, several of the participants and teachers shared their experiences of the divine time at Parmarth, on the holy banks of Mother Ganga. Everyone was so sad to leave and so filled with appreciation for the divine teachings as well as divine touch they received during the week.

Following the ceremony, all of the saints, dignitaries and participants walked together -- to the sound of Vedic Chanting accompanied by a rousing drum beat -- down to the banks of Mother Ganga for the concluding Ganga Aarti



Pujya Swamij blesses the Hon'ble Governor and Lady Governor



Blessing Chris Miglino



Blessing Clive and Eriko Mayhew



Blessing
Sat Siri
(Rachel
Dougherty)

After the Aarti, Pujya Swamiji blessed His Excellency the Honorable Governor and the Honorable Lady Governor with a special shawl and also with His blessings for great health and strength so that the Honorable Governor's work for this divine state could continue.

Then, all of the yogacharyas and group leaders received special blessings from the saints and from the Honorable Governor, in the form of a shawl and a sacred Rudraksh mala.

It was a divine conclusion to a divine week, filled with divine teaching, divine touch and divine transformation!

The final aarti, followed by a special dinner hosted by His Excellency, the Honorable Governor, was especially divine and no one wanted to leave from the holy banks of Mother Ganga.



Giving a shawl and blessings to Dr. David Frawley (Vamadev Shastriji)



Blessing Gurmukh Kaur Khalsa and Gurushabd Singh Khalsa



Swami Ramdevji & Swami Yoganandaji with Gurmukh



Hon'ble
Lady
Governor
gives a
shawl
to
Sadhvi
Suhradji

Cultural Evenings & Yoga Demos

There were also special yoga demonstrations by the rishikumars from Parmarth Gurukul as well as by yoga students from Shantikunj Ashram, Dev Sanskriti Vishwavidyala as well as a team from Portugal!

Further, each evening we had special cultural performances of local, Uttarakhand song and dance routines. More than 800 villagers participated over the course of the weeklong festival, giving a true taste of the glorious, ancient culture of the Uttarakhand Himalayas



Parmarth Rishikumars give a yoga demonstration on the banks of Ganga



Cultural Performance





Parmarth Rishikumars give a yoga demonstration on the banks of Ganga



Parmarth Niketan is lit up beautifully!





Pujya Swamiji's Itinerary May - July 2008

May

1-5	Italy & Switzerland
6-10	Gangotri
11-12	Mukwa, Uttarkashi
13-31	Rishikesh

June

1-2	Bangalore
3	Delhi
4-30	Rishikesh

July

1	Rishikesh
4-10	Hong Kong and South-East Asia
12-16	California - LA and San Francisco
18-19	Louisville, KY
20	Rome/Atlanta Georgia
21-22	Toronto, Canada
23-24	Winnipeg, Canada
25-27	Chicago
29-31	Pittsburgh

** Please note: Pujya Swamiji's schedule is always subject to change.
Please email to parmarth@parmarth.com for up-to-date information*

Divine Message



There is a wonderful story told of two monks who had renounced the world and taken vows of celibacy and simplicity and pledged to live, unattached, in the jungles for the rest of their lives. One monk was older and the other was relatively young. They were wandering in the forest one day and came upon a rushing river. On the edge of the river stood a beautiful and stranded young woman. Her face was marked by anxiety as she explained to the two monks that she needed to get across but it was rushing too fast and she was afraid. She humbly requested the monks if one of them would be good enough to carry her across. The older monk immediately picked her up gallantly and carried her to the other side while the younger monk walked by his side. Upon reaching the other shore, the monk placed the woman safely on the ground, and bid her farewell.

One week later the two monks were sitting under a tree for their morning meditations when the younger monk suddenly exclaimed, "Okay, I've been keeping this inside for the last week but I cannot keep it inside anymore. I cannot believe the way you picked up that young, beautiful woman and carried her body so close to yours. After taking vows of celibacy before God, after promising to forsake the touch of a woman, how could you wrap your arms around her body and carry her tightly in your arms? I have lost all respect for you!"

The elder monk listened with a faint smile growing across his face. "My brother," he said when the younger monk had finished his tirade. "I carried that young woman in my arms for approximately 2 minutes and left her by the side of the river, after setting her down safely. She has not been with me since. You, on the other hand, have carried her in your heart for the last week. You have eaten with her, slept with her, breathed with her and even meditated with her because you cannot get her out of your mind. She is living permanently in your mind and heart. It is your own heart you must seek to purify, not the actions of your traveling companions."

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How many precious minutes of each day do we waste by judging others? Too many, I think. We barely even realize how much we do it. We analyze and judge each other's actions, words, and even each others' articles of clothing or choice of perfume. We assume, naturally, that if we were in their shoes we would do everything better. But, like in the case of the two monks, it is really our own hearts which need to be bettered, not the actions of another.



This constant judging and condemning of others pollutes our own hearts, wastes our precious time, creates boundaries and barriers between us, and steals our peace. We are so busy re-hashing everything other people did during the day that we cannot fall asleep at night.

Our constant judging of others is not only detrimental to our inter-personal relationships but it also wrecks havoc on our own mental health. The more we become focused on others and their perceived faults, the farther we stray from our own path. To judge others makes us feel superior, confident, worthy. We value ourselves in comparison to others. Therefore, to put others down makes us feel higher in comparison. However, this is not the way to succeed in any arena of life.

We may feel temporarily good when we put others down. Our egos get a natural “high” when we criticize and condemn the other. Yet, we are actually sinking lower and lower on our own quest for true peace and on our own spiritual path.

In the West people frequently engage in what they call “Spring Cleaning.” At this time of year, when the cold snow of winter melts, leaving budding flowers in its wake, when the warmth of the summer sun begins to penetrate the darkness of the rain clouds, we engage in an annual cleaning. We clean every room of the house; we dust every corner of the garage, we sweep behind bookshelves, vacuum under beds and empty out cabinets. But, what about our hearts? When was the last time we swept out our hearts; when did we last empty them of all the dirt and garbage that has accumulated over the last year?

That is the real cleaning we must do. That is the real meaning of “Spring Cleaning”. We must sweep out our hearts, ridding them of darkness and bitterness; we must make them clean and sparkling places for God to live. We must be as thorough with ourselves as we are with our homes. Are there any dark corners in our hearts we have avoided for so long? Are we simply “sweeping all the dirt under the rug”? God sees all and knows all. He knows what is behind every wall of our hearts, what is swept into every corner, and hidden under every rug. So this spring/summer time, let us truly clean out our hearts; let us rid ourselves of the grudges, pain, and anger that clutter our ability to love freely, and let us throw it all away. Let us empty out every nook and cranny; so that His divine light can shine throughout.

Let us pledge to live a life of examination – but examination of ourselves, not of others. Let us take our own test each night, not the test of others. Let us rid our hearts and minds of judgment, the insidious thief of time and energy. Let us have a big, beautiful “Spring Cleaning” of our hearts and minds so that we can truly commit ourselves to a spiritual path.

