

# Winter 07/08' Newsletter

The Sangha Yoga Newsletter

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## The Ancient Link Between Prana and Citta

I have just recently returned from a month in Europe, teaching workshops in Amsterdam and Zürich as well as visiting family and friends and doing some skiing in the Alps. Truth be told, I almost didn't want to come home! But here I am and delighted to be back.

While it was a hard decision to let go of Yoga Sangha, I love the freedom that has come from it. Yoga Sangha was my main project for the last 4 years, and allowing it to transition into the capable hands of Sarasawati Clere and Yoga Kula was really the most joyful and strategic decision I could make at this time in my life and career.

While I treasure the experience of running a business enormously, having learned so much in the process, I have also learned, thanks to guidance of some dear wise friends, that to maximize my impact in the world, I should focus on "doing only that which only I can do." I constantly had to balance the ease and joy of being a yoga and spiritual teacher, with the challenges of running a studio.

Saraswati is one of the most gifted studio owners around, so it made perfect sense to turn the studio over to her, freeing me to do "that which only I can do," to be a yoga teacher, a spiritual guide, an activist and sangha builder.

Moving out of the role of studio owner has led me right back into the dreamy, sweet space of the yogini that I am. Now, I'm catching elusive threads of complex yoga philosophy and finding new ways to share it with my students, instead of my old life which was filled with finding subs for sick yoga teachers and administrative tasks!

As I am starting this brand new chapter, I'm finding life to be uncertain and exhilarating all at the same time. Actually, we are always at the threshold of the new, having to let go of the old.

I am spending my time making vision boards (visual collage of goals and intentions), doing increased Metta practices (loving kindness) and exploring purpose, picturing on how I would like to feel and “be” going into the future. I am sinking into the state of pure feeling and “being.” In Yoga philosophy we would refer to this as the state of Prana, or life energy, where we get to simply be, breathe and observe sensations that allow us to immediately get in touch with Prana.

Especially in our world, it is a relief to leave the world of Citta or Mind and enter into a simple state of being. Lucky are those who discover how to approach life through Prana rather than just Citta.

The link between Citta and Prana has been documented well. For example in scriptures such as the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, it is said that Citta and Prana swim together like two fish in complete harmony. Where one goes, the other follows.

Most of us here in the Western Hemisphere try to understand, control and manipulate our mind in order to reach freedom and happiness. While that strategy can sometimes produce results, generally this approach is slow and tedious. The mind can only understand itself through its past patterns, concepts and understandings and so it is very limited.

This is true especially if we don't expose our brain to frequent paradox, challenges and new viewpoints (like reading an intellectual book or talking to someone from a completely different cultural background). By following the same patterns and habits, Citta will get smaller and more narrow, traveling down the same old paths. Buddhists call this narrowing “the small sense of Self”. Because our life energy is linked to Citta, it too will become smaller and smaller.

As yogi(ni)s, we soon discover this phenomena and we do our best to explore the possibility of reversing and expanding our approach. If we can do our practice in a non-competitive, non-judging and non-aggressive way (all Citta related concepts), we discover Prana and learn to follow it. The magic happens in the process of following Prana through its winding path; Citta can't help but be transformed and opened and thus returns to it's empty, spacious state, also called “the original mind.”

Prana doesn't discern between pleasant and unpleasant sensations or experience, because all becomes grist for the mill. Prana does not judge. It simply leads us where it must, to energetic or physical blockages as well as to places of strength and talent. Prana has its own direct and powerful intelligence and when we learn to follow its flow, we will encounter both the dark and the bright in us. It allows us to address life's problems from a new and fresh perspective.

One of the strengths of a Yoga practice lies in its ability to literally reverse how we see the world. We do it in down dog or headstand - any time we turn ourselves upside down. But the true magic comes from following Prana rather than the all-consuming Citta, which is exactly what happens when we practice yoga, contemplate art, surrender to dancing and chanting or travel in a different culture.

Even just a few moments of sinking into Prana each day, letting ourselves breathe, observe sensations, feelings and thoughts will turn Prana into the leader and help expand the mind.

An extra benefit from practicing in this way comes by recognizing that Prana intuitively knows things that Citta doesn't.

For example, Prana will guide my hands to someone's injured body part during a yoga class even though my mind didn't know about the injury. Prana will create those special, synchronized moments where the person you just thought about suddenly calls. Prana will lead you to the right place at the right time to the right person.

What is your way of finding Prana? My invitation this winter is to take some time to reflect on the activities that allow us to cultivate Prana and then make a commitment to practice them often.