

ANUSARA YOGA, A CELEBRATION OF THE HEART

by Bo Srey

a Anusara Yoga Teacher at Absolute Yoga Bangkok, Thailand.

Anusara Yoga recently celebrated its 10th anniversary on August 15, 2007. I took my first Anusara Class at my Guru's Ashram in Upstate New York about two years later. John Friend, founder of Anusara Yoga, led the 200 plus person class in the beautiful hatha yoga studio that he helped design for our guru and self-realized master, Gurumayi Chidvilasananda. Gurumayi named that studio *Ashirwad* or blessings in Sanskrit. John Friend often tells how his inspiration to create the Anusara method came from the blessings of Gurumayi. I believe John's teachings come directly from a deep remembrance of the Source. His words draw inspiration from the power that breathes life in all of us.

In the recent Master Immersion, a gathering of the top Anusara teachers from around the world, John shared his original vision for Anusara yoga that he wrote down on August 15, 1997 in Gurumayi's Ashram in South Fallsburg, N.Y. Here is an excerpt of that vision, which has truly been my experience of practicing Anusara yoga and of studying with John Friend:

Anusara yoga is a hatha yoga system that unifies Universal Principles of Alignment with a philosophy that is epitomized by what I call "Celebration of the Heart". In this philosophy we take the premise that each of us is essentially good, so there is a lot of acceptance and allowance in this system for difference and deviation. We practice looking for the good in things, especially in ourselves and in our students.

He continues:

As Anusara yoga teachers, we are not trying to fix or correct the students. We are trying to help enhance and reveal the beauty and divine qualities that are already present in the students' poses. One of the other key aspects of this attitude or philosophy is that we are all co-creators with nature or the Supreme in this life. And this Supreme Freedom makes life fun ,exciting and inspiring. Life is seen as not a hard-labor assignment without chance of parole, but as a fun game that can be celebrated each day. The poses in Anusara yoga are considered to be heart-oriented and are expressed from inside out. Instead of only trying to control the body and mind from the outside, the poses originate from a deep artistic feeling inside. There is an emphasis on remembering the spiritual purpose of hatha yoga which includes reconnecting with our innate goodness, power and beauty, and expressing ourselves from that Divine place.

In my first Anusara class with John Friend, I experienced a method of teaching yoga radically different to anything I had practiced before. He talked about opening to something bigger; we chanted an invocation; the students were playful; we got off our mats and worked with a partner. He talked about hugging your muscles to the bones and drawing your leg muscles up into your hips like putting on energy stockings. He said things like, “From the core of your pelvis, shine out like a five pointed star.” Or, “Draw your inner thighs back and apart and blossom your butt.” While part of me didn’t quite understand the profound simplicity of the method at that time, a deeper part of me was rocked by this radical new way of teaching. My body felt stable and strong yet my spirit was free and light.

Now, as an Anusara teacher, I see a few of my new students having a similar experience. Initially, they talk about how they don’t get something they’ve just learned in class like “inner spiral”, one of the Universal Principles of Alignment. While they continue to enjoy the practice and they appear brighter and happier afterwards, I believe the mind still wonders...it wants to know, it thinks it doesn’t know. This is good. A verse from the Sanskrit hymn, *Shri Guru Gita*, extols, “One who (thinks he) knows not, knows; one who (thinks he) knows, knows not.” Knowing happens on many levels other than the mind. Through the Principles, one can experience a “Celebration of the Heart”.

What I find fascinating is that when I look at those student’s bodies, they are actually doing all of these things they wonder about and their poses express the inner beauty of the Heart. So why don’t they *think* they get it initially?

On one hand, I think that the Anusara method is *simple*. The method is simple because a beginner can quickly become familiar with the Principles. A beginner to the method may have a radical shift in her practice or he may experience a healing in the body in the first class. A beginner to yoga may even experience an awakening in the very first class. Recently, someone new to the method asked me, “Do these principles work on the chakras? When I move my inner thighs back and apart and scoop my tailbone, I feel a tingling energy moving up my body.” Through the power of remembering the heart, Grace can fill us at any moment.

At the same time, the method is not necessarily *easy*.

While the Principles are *simple* because they are very clear, systematic, logical and they work harmoniously with nature, they do require constant, precise, and disciplined practice to master. Anyone can enjoy painting, but it takes dedication to become a great Artist. Moreover, to understand a system, you not only must study its individual parts, you have to study how the whole system works. And this is a great thing about Anusara. It empowers—you learn a set of principles, rather than individual instructions for different poses. Then, you can apply the principles to any form the human body might assume. By applying the Principles, the body more harmoniously aligns with nature. This balance with nature heals us and ultimately leads us back to our true Self. Our lives then become a creative expression of that essence within.

Learning Anusara Yoga, specifically the Universal Principles of Alignment, is like learning the *techniques* of how to paint a painting. With an openness to draw

inspiration from the Heart, the right techniques and constant practice, the painter can one day be called an Artist. Similarly, with constant application of the Universal Principles of Alignment and the philosophy of the “Celebration of the Heart”, the student can one day be called the Master.



Bo Srey is an Anusara Yoga Teacher. Having practiced yoga and meditation since 1996, he brings a joyful and caring spirit into the yoga practice. Bo's main teachers are Siddha Master Gurumayi and Anusara Yoga founder John Friend. He is also grateful for the wisdom and guidance from other great teachers like Jim Bernaert, Tony Briggs, Rudrani Farbman and Mark Whitwell.

Bo found in Anusara a style of Hatha Yoga that begins with the most sublime intention of connecting the student to their highest auspicious nature, goes on to address physical alignment with powerful bio-mechanical principles, and returns to the initial intention in a constant creative dance. Bo's classes reflect this primordial dance. They are challenging yet fun and light. While grounded in sound bio mechanical principles of alignment, Bo constantly encourages students to access their innate wisdom, letting the practice of asana be a joyful unfolding of each student's divine nature.

Bo has taught workshops, retreats and teacher trainings throughout the world from New York to San Francisco, from Indonesia to Singapore. Bo is currently teaching at Absolute Yoga Bangkok, Thailand.