

SUSTAINABILITY in today's world

Long-time Ashram resident and teacher, Swami Satyananda writes about what she has learned from the Ashram's environmental work – and how the practice of yoga helps bring our inner and outer environments back into balance.

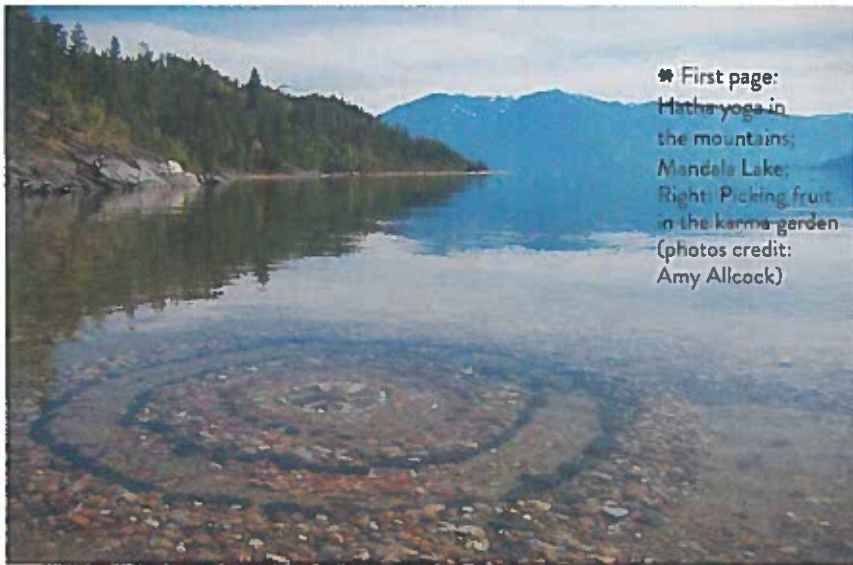
Waking up each day, a feeling of gratitude washes through me for the choices I've made in my life. Thirty-five years ago, the choice was to step out of predictability and into a life more aligned with what I value. It was the beginning of a journey that I am still on today – learning how to live in harmony with both my inner and outer worlds. This on-going daily work is more fulfilling than I could have imagined.

It takes effort and thinking deeply to make the changes needed in today's world – taking the time to reflect about the issues we are all facing. What is the purpose of life? What makes it meaningful? What does it mean to live sustainably? What does this mean to each of us individually, to our communities and to the earth? What will it take to make the changes needed?

These questions about the purpose of life and what makes it meaningful were asked the first time I came to Yasodhara Ashram in 1983. They are also among the first questions asked in *Kundalini Yoga for the West* written by Swami Radha, the founder of Yasodhara Ashram. Asking these questions are the entry into the Kundalini Yoga system – a path of spiritual evolution handed down through thousands of years. This path is available to anyone who wants to live a life of integrity based on self-inquiry.

SELF-REFLECTION

Everyone who comes to the Ashram enters into an environment which invites self-reflection. It is a chance to step back and get perspective about life, about what it means to live in today's world and to let the questions arise that need to be asked. »



✦ First page:
Hatha yoga in
the mountains;
Mandala Lake;
Right: Picking fruit
in the karma garden
(photos credit:
Amy Allcock)



The first time I considered these questions about purpose and meaning, they made me stop and look at what was happening in my life and the choices I'd made, both consciously and unconsciously.

My relationships, career and community were all sustaining a lifestyle that was not ultimately fulfilling. Coming to the Ashram and beginning to work with yoga practices and reflective questions helped lift these questions about the purpose of life more into my conscious awareness. I began to have a closer look at my life.

During this first visit to the Ashram, I was relieved and grateful for connecting with others who were asking the same questions, who wanted to understand themselves and the world we live in. I also experienced an overwhelming feeling of gratitude for coming in contact with a lineage of teachers and teachings that resonated deeply with what I was searching for. Acknowledging and expressing my feelings of gratitude began to turn my world around. It helped me begin asking the questions I needed to ask and start making the changes I needed to make. In the Kundalini yoga system gratitude is described as a power —

'Gratitude is one of the strongest powers and the finest emotion that a human being is capable of. Be grateful for what you have, right now, right where you are. If you are not grateful for what you receive, you will lose it. Do not waste this life. Cultivate gratitude, for it brings many blessings.'

SWAMI RADHA, KUNDALINI YOGA FOR THE WEST

I recognize now that gratitude is a power that has sustained me through all the challenges which have come with making significant changes in my life. It is a power that connects me to my community, to this sacred land and its history. Remembering what I am grateful for, while acknowledging the challenges, helps me sustain an inner and outer balance in my life.

LIVING SUSTAINABLY

What does it mean to live sustainably? How can gratitude be cultivated as a powerful force for change in today's world?

The moment I step into a new day and enter into the Ashram landscape another wave of gratitude sweeps through me. I am greeted by an uplifting heart-opening sense of space — wide-open sky, sometimes gray with a luminous quality of light, surrounded by mountains, lake and forest. The air is

fresh, vibrant and pure — a gift when there are so many places in the world where this is not a reality.

The Ashram is nestled on the shores of Kootenay Lake, surrounded by mountain ranges and embraced by evergreen forests; in many ways fulfilling Swami Sivananda's words to Swami Radha, so many years ago on the banks of the Ganges River. He told her she would establish an Ashram when she returned to Canada and it would be surrounded by mountains, water and "lots of big trees."

In the silence of the Ashram forests, there is a sense of presence that invites whoever comes here into an experience of stillness, opening to the present moment. In this place of standing still, awareness naturally comes back to the breath and the life force that sustains us all.

The commitment to living sustainably and reducing our impact on the environment is reflected in every aspect of the Ashram. The gardens and orchards provide nourishing food throughout the year, supplemented by our commitment to support local agriculture. This farm-to-table approach embodies a vision of self-sufficiency and sustainability for ourselves and future generations.

Geo-thermal installations are the energy source for heating and cooling three of the Ashram's largest buildings. Solar hot water panels, heat source pumps, building retrofits and a photovoltaic installation all contribute to reducing our carbon emissions. All of this has led to environmental awards for reducing energy consumption, having innovative and energy efficient technologies and practical, sustainable practices.

Along the way, we are exploring and learning about alternative renewable energy sources. What does it really mean to live sustainably, in harmony with ourselves, our communities and our planet? What are the challenges of this reality, whether living in a city or a remote location? How do our ideals and values take form in the everyday realm of decisions and choices that support these?

THE TEMPLE OF LIGHT

At the centre of the Ashram is the Temple of Light which is, in many ways, a response to these questions. It symbolizes the essence of Swami Radha's vision and our commitment to keep this alive in the world. It is also a real and visible example of the Ashram's commitment to renewable energy.

The many doors entering into the Temple symbolize the uniqueness of each individual and the many different paths we



✦ Left: aerial photo of The Temple of Light (credit: Daniel Seguin); temple interior (credit: Amy Allcock)

choose to follow in life. When we are willing to step into this space and be in the Light of understanding, differences fall away. There is a remembrance of what it means to be human and the responsibility that comes with this – to understand the consequences of our actions and to make wise choices.

In this place of respect and appreciation, new ways of working together begin to emerge. An expansive sense of harmony and a feeling of hope begin humming, rippling from inward to outward.

KARMA YOGA: SELFLESS SERVICE

This rippling of hope manifests in the desire to give back to life. The practice of Karma Yoga – the yoga of selfless service – is at the core of all that happens at the Ashram. Everyone who comes enters into its daily practice, ranging from offering two hours of service daily to full-time Karma Yoga programs.

Ashram Karma Yoga includes garden, preserving and cooking. Caring for our sources of food brings awareness of cycles of nature and how to work in harmony with these. It brings a sense of gratitude and reverence for the life force that sustains us all.

'Reverence for all life is necessary in order to practice Ahimsa (non-injury).'

SWAMI RADHA, KUNDALINI YOGA FOR THE WEST

LIVING THE PRACTICE

Living in community, whether a family, neighborhood, village or spiritual community, is where the real practice of awareness begins. Swami Radhananda, the spiritual director of the Ashram, describes this as “living the practice.” It is the daily challenge of bringing awareness and quality into every choice that we make.

'The future of our world depends on bringing our knowledge into action. As human beings, we are aware enough to make choices that can affect our evolution. We can question how to evolve toward being fully human and ask: What is the purpose of this life?'

SWAMI RADHANANDA, LIVING THE PRACTICE

A way I bring knowledge into action is through a yoga practice called the Divine Light Invocation. It helps create a receptive space in both my body and mind for questions to come forward and inner guidance to emerge.

In this practice I am visualizing Light flowing into my body and being filled with an ever-renewing source of love and compassion. From this place of abundance and gratitude, I consciously choose to give back to life – to loved ones, those in need, situations in need of light, and to the world.

'Spiritual tools can open minds to a broader perspective, put life into a context in which we begin to feel gratitude for what we've been given, because things start to make sense. You will discover that there is a purpose and a reason to life. You start to learn about your mind and how it creates the world that you live in.

The inner life reflects the outer life.'

SWAMI RADHANANDA, LIVING THE PRACTICE

Gratitude is a powerful force for change in today's world. Imagine the possibilities if each one of us, part of this precious earth, was giving back from a place of gratitude – gratitude for our lives and all that sustains us.

'We can begin to understand how much there is to learn and how fragile our existence is. It's important to give wholeheartedly back to life. A different vibration of gratitude is set in motion, a clearer way of looking at the world and the mystery it holds.'

SWAMI RADHANANDA, LIVING THE PRACTICE ●

Find out more

✦ Yasodhara Ashram, located in south-eastern British Columbia, has a wealth of experience gathered over 55 years about how to live sustainably in today's world and reduce our impact on the natural world. The spectacular beauty of the Ashram's setting, as well as on-going dedication to sustainability and resilience, continue to be an inspiration for anyone who wants to live in harmony with our precious earth.

✦ yasodhara.org

✦ *Kundalini Yoga for the West: A Foundation for Character Building, Courage & Awareness* by Swami Radha: yasodhara.org/online-store/kundalini-yoga-for-the-west-softcover

✦ *Living the Practice: Collected Writings on the Transformative Potential of Yoga* by Swami Radhananda: yasodhara.org/online-store/living-the-practice