

Nourishing mind, body, and spirit

Yasodhara Yoga studio prepares to celebrate 30 years in Spokane

By Nina Culver

FOR THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

A small unassuming building set back from the street in Brown's Addition houses the Yasodhara Yoga studio, attracting people looking for a spiritual component to their yoga stretches and poses.

Sheila Thomsen, one of several volunteer instructors, said she likes the small size of the building perched on the edge of a steep slope at 406 S. Coeur d'Alene St. "It's small, so our classes are always small," she said. "I think that's a good thing."

The yoga studio is associated with the Yasodhara Ashram in British Columbia, which was founded by Swami Sivananda Radha. "We've had a presence in Spokane for 30 years," Thomsen said.

The studio was known as Radha Yoga for many years before the name was changed in 2014. It had been at Pacific Avenue and Poplar Street since 1989 until it moved to its current location in 2000.

The number of students has fallen since the name change, Thomsen said. "We've started to realize that people don't know we're still here," she said.

The instructors are planning a 30th anniversary celebration and open house from 3 to 6 p.m. on Sept. 28 to let people know what they offer. There will be dancing, singing and refreshments.

Thomsen said she hopes that people will be interested in a more traditional form of yoga that emphasizes spirituality. "The yoga poses are traditional but many of the studios are only interested in the physical aspects of yoga," she said. "In our classes we bring in some of the philosophy and some of the spiritual practices."

One of the instructors, who uses the name Parvati when she teaches, said she first discovered Yasodhara Yoga in 1990. "I was looking for real yoga," she said. "What makes it real is because it's based on ancient teachings."

Parvati has taught yoga at the studio since 1994. All instructors are required to attend a three-month personal development retreat at the Yasodhara Ashram before they can teach. Parvati said she started teaching because there was a shortage of teachers at the time.

"Swami Radha said the best teachers are the ones who don't want to teach," she said. "I didn't have that aspiration. I think I just wanted to go deeper and share what I learned."

The studio offers a variety of workshops as well as Hatha Yoga classes every Tuesday and



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Jessica Bartlett participates in a morning Hatha class at Yasodhara Yoga Spokane studio on Tuesday. Yasodhara emphasizes the spiritual aspects of yoga, led by teachers who have trained at the Yasodhara Ashram near Nelson, B.C. The studio is at 406 S. Coeur d'Alene St.



Neal and Jan Penney participate in a Tuesday morning Hatha class at Yasodhara Yoga Spokane studio. Neal has been involved in yoga for about 12 years, and Jan said she's been coming to Yasodhara Yoga Spokane since 2001.

Thursday from 10 to 11:15 a.m., every Monday from 5:45 to 7 p.m. and every Thursday from 5:45 to 6:45 p.m. Eight classes in an eight-week session are \$70 or people can buy five classes for \$50. The drop-in rate is \$12 per class. People of limited means are invited to the Thursday evening class which is "Pay as you can." The suggested donation is \$5, but people can pay as little as \$1. More information is available at yasodharayoga.org/spokane.

A recent Tuesday morning Hatha Yoga session was led by

Jan Thorne. A couple of regulars were missing, leaving five in the class. Music played quietly in the background while Thorne led the group in a series of yoga poses. She often urged them to listen to their bodies and to "go as far as feels right."

"Keep your focus on the pose and don't let your mind slip away," she said. "Yoga is really about being present."

At several points in the class she led the class in the Divine Light invocation created by Swami Radha. "I am created by

divine light," she said. "I am sustained by divine light. I am protected by divine light. I am surrounded by divine light. I am ever growing into divine light."

Neal Penney said he started coming to classes at Yasodhara Yoga 12 years ago after his wife Jan convinced him to come with her. "It's just so peaceful," he said. "It's such a good rest for your body."

The classes help him "work out kinks" and said he's able to do things he couldn't do before, like bend over and touch the

ground. "The physical part is the most remarkable," he said.

Jan Penney said she stumbled onto Yasodhara Yoga after doing yoga other places. "I call it yoga aerobics," she said of the other classes.

Still, it took her some time to warm up to the new, more relaxed style. "At first I didn't care for it," she said. "It wasn't quick or strenuous enough. After about six months I realized I loved it more than anything else I'd ever done. I learned a lot from the philosophy."