

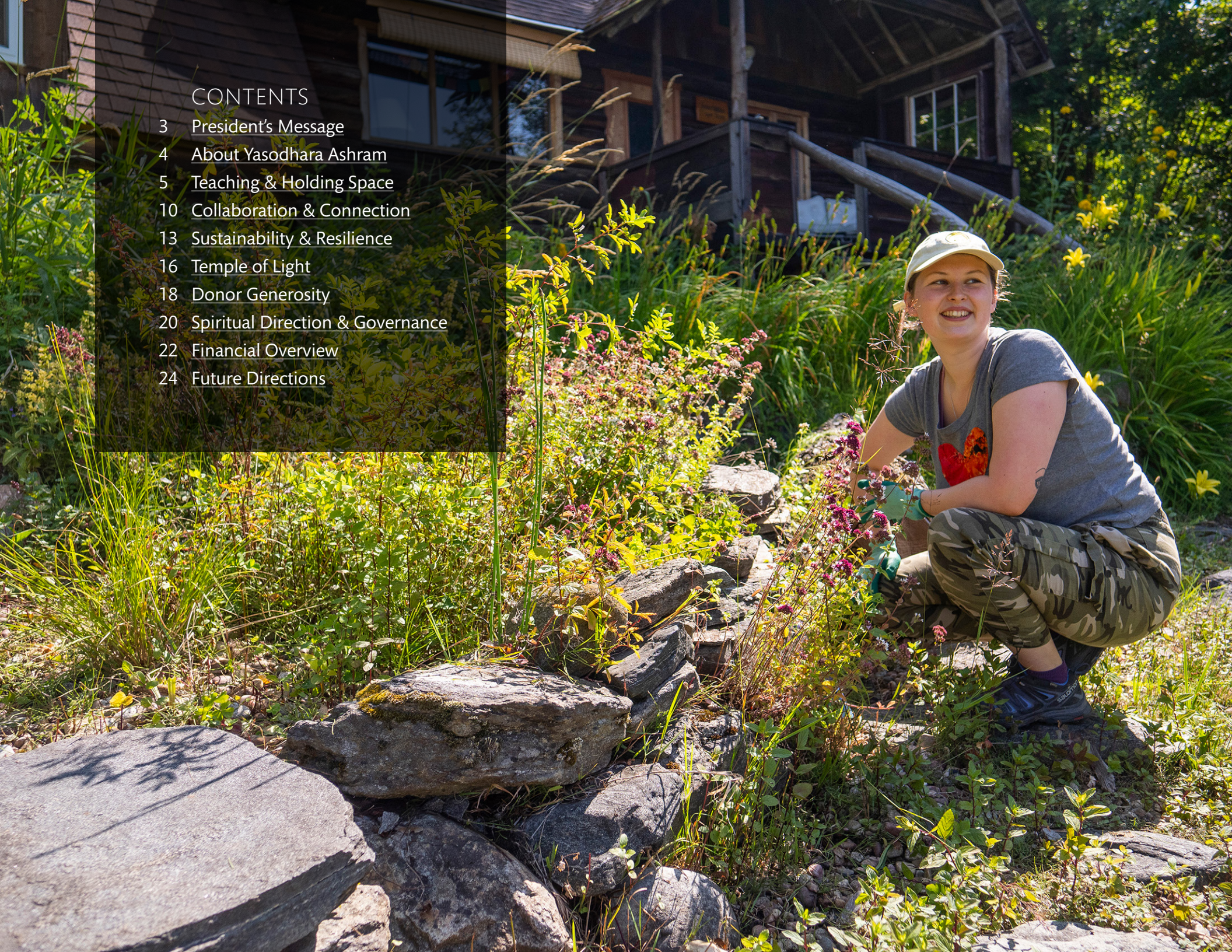


Yasodhara Ashram
YOGA RETREAT & STUDY CENTRE

2019

Annual Review
A Year of Preparation





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President's Message



Looking at 2019 from the perspective of spring 2020 and the pandemic is like looking back at another era. But in retrospect, our work in 2019 was a helpful preparation for the unknown.

2019 was a year filled with people, activities and programs at the Ashram. It was a time of travel—gathering with students and meeting new colleagues. We stretched ourselves to accommodate bookings with aligned groups, and we looked forward through a strategic planning process focused on long-term succession.

Internally we concentrated on stabilizing operations, which included investing in sufficient employees to fill our needs, especially during the busy summer months. At the same time, we began planning the Pathways Program to invite in longer-term and younger generations of residents.

With the Ashram land encompassing 115 acres and 22 buildings, we also continued to invest in long-term infrastructure. We gathered assessments from consultants in forest management, water, energy and fire mitigation with implementation forecast over a number of years.

In our strategic planning process, we mapped out a 5-7 year plan for change, with the next few years encouraging senior residents to step back and offer mentorship to those stepping forward.

Part of our strategic planning process was also connecting with leaders from other centres around the world, many who are experiencing similar issues of sustainability, succession and generational transfer. The value of collaboration and collective learning came to the forefront.

As a group of Ashram leaders, we clarified the Ashram's essential purpose as carrying forward Swami Radha's teachings and this lineage, and serving Divine Mother through commitment. We set a course for the future and expanded our capacity in the present. It was a full year of preparation, progress and expansion. And it was a privilege to honour two long-term teachers deepening their commitment through initiation, and to know that the powerful stream of the lineage continues to flow.

The theme we set for 2020 was "Focus Inward, Focus Forward." It is not quite the year we expected, but the theme still applies as we look inward to deepen our own connection to the Light and pause to reimagine the opportunities within the challenges.

Swami Lalitananda

SWAMI LALITANANDA

About Us

Yasodhara Ashram is a yoga retreat and study centre founded by Swami Sivananda Radha in 1963 in Kootenay Bay, British Columbia. As a Canadian charity and active learning centre, our purpose is to stimulate open intellectual and spiritual enquiry, supporting the potential of transformation in each person. We offer a wide range of programs year round, helping people to evolve and lead fulfilling lives. We are also a residential community where we practice living what we teach.



Teaching & Holding Space



The Ashram offers a range of courses and retreats varying in length from day visits to a three-month intensive. Our programs combine traditional yogic practices with innovative experiential learning. Spiritually we focus on Light and the Divine Feminine, bringing forward qualities of courage, intuition, awareness and character building. Teachers also go on tour each year offering workshops and retreats across Canada and Europe. Our teachings are supplemented by publications from our publishing branch, Timeless Books. We value relationships with individuals and organizations that hold similar values and invite ongoing learning.

+36%
10 Day Yoga Journey

+15%
First-time Guests

+2,000 Drop-in
Visitors

COURSES & RETREATS

Whether someone arrives for a weekend retreat at Yasodhara Ashram or the three-month Yoga Development Course, we often hear that their time here exceeds their expectations. They feel inspired—held in the beauty and welcoming atmosphere, and receiving tools that help them open to their own wisdom and healing.

2019 was a full year for our courses and retreats, with record numbers in our 10 Day Yoga Journey—a 36% increase over last year. We saw 15% more first-time guests, and had record numbers in our Equinox and Stilling the Mind retreats. We also celebrated the 50th year of the Yoga Development Course. Our Family Retreat held more than 60 adults and children, and more than 2,000 visitors dropped in for self-guided tours of the Ashram grounds and Temple.

All this happened while we faced major transportation challenges. Greyhound bus service was withdrawn in May, and the shuttle from our closest airport stopped service. In the summer, the ferry operated on a limited schedule and in the fall ferry workers went on strike, which disrupted service for four months. Our Welcome Centre responded heroically with intense research into alternative options for individuals, and also by organizing over 90 trips to the Castlegar airport to pick up and drop off guests.

TEACHERS ON TOUR OUTREACH

This year's 2019-2020 European tour started in London, followed by an extended visit to Germany—including a 4-week program to Bad Meinberg, a large Ashram in West Germany, followed by workshops at a Dominican Monastery in Leipzig, East Germany. There were workshops in Portugal and on the east coast of England, but then the tour was abruptly cut short by coronavirus lockdowns. Almost 600 people participated and more than 300 of those were new to our teachings.

In Canada the Ashram collaborated with Patkau Architects to host a dynamic conversation highlighting the integration of innovative architecture and spiritual purpose of the Temple of Light. Workshops and events were offered in Vancouver and Vancouver Island, in the Okanagan and in Calgary. In Eastern Canada we offered a weekend retreat at a venue outside of Ottawa, and gave workshops in Ottawa and Halifax.

TEACHER SERVICE PROGRAM

Teachers certified by Yasodhara Ashram are encouraged to return annually for renewal by creating their own blended program of Karma Yoga, teaching, personal practice and participation in courses. Sixteen Yasodhara Yoga teachers came for stays ranging from a few weeks to several months. They supported the day-to-day operations and contributed to our teaching pool. Our teachers, wherever they live, are an invaluable part of our community and carry the inspiration of the Ashram back to their own students.



PATHWAYS PROGRAM

After completing an initial One Month Karma Yoga program, participants can now apply to our new Pathways Program. When karma yogis extend for an additional three, six, twelve or twenty-four months, they receive benefits including participating in progressively longer Ashram courses—from two days to the 10 Days of Yoga to the three-month Yoga Development Course.

KARMA YOGA PROGRAM

The One Month Karma Yoga Program welcomes participants of all ages interested in experiencing life in a spiritual community. Participants learn about transforming work into spiritual practice through an attitude of devotion, an understanding of symbolism and an ideal of selfless service. This program integrates the Young Adult Program for 18-30 year olds.

This year we welcomed 71 participants, 25 who were young adults. Many extended their stay beyond the initial one month commitment. It was uplifting to witness their deep learning in action.

A highlight this year was having newly retired participants in the program. They expressed the great value in being with young people, while at the same time offering a perspective from their careers and life experience.

Nine students from the 2019 program enrolled in the 2020 Yoga Development Course, taking the next step in deepening their self-knowledge.

LEARNING RESIDENCY PROGRAM

Learning Residencies at Yasodhara Ashram are spiritual and career/life development opportunities. LRs further develop skills as well as contributing to the Ashram community and engaging in self-development workshops and classes. This year, our seventh for the program, we accepted Learning Residents in the Preserving Kitchen and Hospitality.

ARTIST & PROFESSIONAL RETREATS

The Ashram offers space for artists and professional retreat guests to be deeply nurtured and renewed. The day-to-day rhythm and flexible structure of optional Hatha Yoga classes, Karma Yoga and satsangs support this renewal.

2019 once again brought a range of retreat guests including writers, an art therapist, a professor and intermedia artist, a musician and the executive director of the Holistic Centers Network. Robin MacDonald, a returning writer, said at the end of her retreat, “Not only were my writing goals met but I clarified my direction for other areas of life, and I was deeply cared for.”

-9%



Books

+19%



eBooks

+33%



Audio Streaming

TIMELESS BOOKS

Timeless, the micro-publishing function of Yasodhara Ashram, continues to publish the teachings of Swami Sivananda Radha and her lineage teachers. This includes publishing and distributing books in print, CDs and DVDs as well as distributing digitally ebooks and audio for purchase and streaming. A number of titles are available in several languages.

In 2019 print sales showed a 9% decline while ebook sales and audio streaming trended upward—with a 19% increase in the number of ebooks sold in 2019 and a 33% increase in the quantity of audio streaming.



Collaboration & Connection



Building and maintaining relationships is a heartfelt priority for the Ashram and our residents. We reach out and invite in like-minded individuals and organizations both locally and globally.

SUPPORTING LOCAL INITIATIVES

The Ashram continues to support the local Chamber of Commerce, Volunteer Fire Department, First Responders, Ambulance Auxiliary and Building East Shore Tourism both by sitting on local boards and by volunteering for active duty.

In the fall we actively collaborated with other concerned citizens on the East Shore when the Kootenay Lake Ferry service was disrupted for four months. We helped organize a working group to publicize the effect on the community and to regain a safe, reliable ferry service.

The Ashram hosted a Youth Climate Action Retreat in August 2019 with eight local youth involved in environmental action coming together to learn yogic tools such as relaxation and asana from our Yasodhara teachers. The teens also collaborated on direction across their regions and enjoyed time to just be young people away from their pressing concerns.

COLLABORATING WITH OTHER CENTRES

The Ashram became a member of the Holistic Centers Network (HCN), a collaborative network that provides opportunity for communication, connection and support among international holistic centres including ashrams, Buddhist monasteries and large and small retreat centres.

Swami Lalitananda attended the HCN Gathering at Hollyhock Institute in May, where she participated in seminars, learned, shared and met like-minded others with similar concerns. The theme of the gathering was generational transfer, which was very timely for the Ashram.

Following this gathering several residents joined HCN working groups—one focused on Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) and the other a gathering of lineage centres. The JEDI group met online monthly to learn from case studies and to challenge entrenched concepts and underlying systems at play in racism. The Ashram is continuing to explore how to bring our ideals of diversity more alive in our community. The Lineage Group, which also met monthly online, offered inquiry, support and diverse viewpoints from leaders at other ashrams and monasteries regarding sustainability of our lineage centres in the current, highly competitive world.

INVITING INDIGENOUS WISDOM

For the third year we hosted Ashram friends, Pahan Pte San Win and Wanbdi Wakita, spiritual leaders from Manitoba, for a fundraising weekend focused on Indigenous wisdom, reconciliation and the power of women's leadership. Funds supported Pahan's third annual Sundance of Women, honouring the spirits of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. It was a serious opportunity to learn how we, as non-Indigenous people, can become allies and showed the need to understand the long history of oppression of the first peoples.

HOSTING GROUPS

At the 2019 strategic planning meeting, collaboration emerged as a direction for the Ashram as we continue to build relationships with like-minded groups. The Ashram's capacity to host groups expanded as the team gained experience in planning and holding the space.

We hosted fifteen groups in 2019, including a six-day Banff Centre Leadership program. One of the faculty said the Ashram "...felt like a perfect place to model a lot of what we are trying to help people learn—how to become still, how to develop their inner world, how to make meaning of things."

We also hosted 130 members of three youth choirs who travelled to the Ashram in November from Nelson, Edmonton and Vancouver.

This year a group of visiting teens from Toronto, many who were people of colour, acted as a catalyst to our examination of our commitment to diversity, which led to our participation in the JEDI group and subsequent further education.

EXTENDING THROUGH MEDIA

Four writers visited the Ashram this year from Go World Travel, Active Life, the Vancouver Sun and Monte Cristo Magazine. Their articles, which highlighted the Ashram, the Temple of Light and our surrounding Kootenay communities, helped to publicize our existence beyond our usual reach, attracting those who are seeking their divine appointment.

Sustainability & Resilience



Over the past 56 years Yasodhara Ashram has become a model community for sustainable living, making decisions that support a healthy future. We recently signed onto the Renewable Energy Kootenays Initiative, committing to 100% renewable energy by 2050. We feel environmental action is an important part of our social responsibility, a practice of the yogic principle of ahimsa (non-injury).



FOOD SUSTAINABILITY

What we call “Food Flow” includes the kitchen, garden, orchard and preserving kitchen, an interdependent system that works together to grow, procure, process, harvest and prepare all of the food that we eat. Menus are based on what is available locally and seasonally from our garden and from the surrounding area, in a farm-to-table philosophy promoting sustainability. The Ashram kitchen created over 60,000 meals in 2019.

In 2019 over 30% of the food served was sourced from the Ashram garden and orchards, or from within 100 km of the Ashram.

This year the Ashram orchard provided a bumper crop. A succession plan for the trees was drawn up and implemented, guaranteeing the viability of this important resource into the future. Many of the fruit-bearing trees on the property predate the founding of the Ashram, and the orchard’s stewardship is integral to our sustainability.

The preserving kitchen adds value to the system. In 2019 an abundance of fresh apple juice and sauce from our own apples has had a starring role in every breakfast. The transformation of simple ingredients through fermentation results in kimchi, sauerkraut and kombucha, fortifying health among residents and guests.

SUSTAINING THE LAND, BUILDINGS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

We continue to repair and maintain our buildings, roads and utilities, with a focus on documenting history and procedures for a transparent transfer of knowledge as the community evolves and becomes more complex. This is especially true with our solar and geothermal systems.

This year we took a big step in wildfire mitigation planning by engaging a consulting firm to do a Wildfire Risk Reduction Plan—an overview and assessment of the Ashram forests that provides us with fuel management guidelines. We also consulted with a logger who has new lighter and more mobile forestry equipment, and an ideology that helps build soils and resilient timber stands while thinning for fuel mitigation. Plans will begin to be implemented as resources become available.

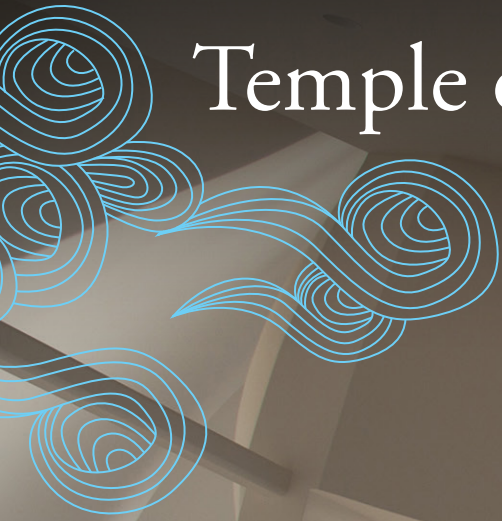
We continued the infrastructure assessments with a local engineering company, which is reviewing our water system, waste water system, electricity, buildings, and fire safety in order to work out a phased-in holistic plan. One concrete step we took in 2019 was to upgrade our water chlorination system.

Repair and maintenance projects completed in 2019 include:

- replacing the roof on Main House
- upgrading the Mandala House root cellar
- assessing and repairing the Temple heat pumps that had been damaged possibly from lightning ground strikes



Temple of Light



The Temple of Light was created from a vision of Swami Radha's. The foundation was laid in 1965 and the first Temple completed in 1992. The eight doorways symbolize diverse spiritual traditions, and the light from the oculus symbolizes the centre where all paths meet. The original Temple was tragically destroyed by fire in 2014, and a new Temple designed by Patkau Architects, was constructed on the original foundation maintaining the essential elements of Swami Radha's vision. This new and innovative Temple opened to the public in 2018 and has emerged as a symbol of resilience, hope and unity.

The Temple of Light offers sacred space each evening for satsang as well as for our mantra, Light and reflection retreats. In 2019 we also hosted special events in the Temple, opening to the local community to enjoy the following dance and music performances:

- Slava Doval and her DanceFusion youth from Nelson performed during the annual Strawberry Social in June
- Anusha Fernando, artistic direction of Shakti Dance in Vancouver, returned in the summer to offer a special repertoire of Bharata Natyam
- the 130 members of Corazon, Kokopelli and Carson Graham youth choirs offered an in-house concert
- Violinist Natasha Hall and pianist Yoomi Kim presented a concert in December

The Temple of Light was featured in the architectural world in 2019 with Patkau Architects receiving the following awards:

- Wood Design Award from WoodWORKS!BC for innovative use of wood
- a Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia Award in Architecture - Innovation Award for achievements that have a direct bearing on the future of architecture
- Award of Merit from Azure Magazine for Architecture/ Buildings under 1000 sq. metres as well as winning Azure's People's Choice Award in the same category

This year landscaping continued to be developed around the Temple with plantings of bushes, birch trees, kinnikinnik, grasses and wildflowers. We are aiming for a vision of controlled wildness and allowing nature to creatively fill the gaps.

Donor Generosity



In 2019 our donors once again demonstrated their generosity in helping sustain all areas of the Ashram, from physical maintenance to programming. As an example, the response to both an August and year-end request for bursary support made it possible for seven young adults to attend the 2020 Yoga Development Course.

Contributors included 155 individuals making recurring monthly donations and an additional 256 people making one-time donations. Two donors made substantial contributions, helping us reach our goal for 2019.

This year we also requested funds to support our elders, who have dedicated their lives to this work. The resulting generous contributions to the Elder Fund shows your heartfelt gratitude to those who have served and now need our care.

Thank you to all!



Spiritual Direction & Governance



Founded by Swami Sivananda Radha, a Western woman who studied in India in the mid-1950s, Yasodhara Ashram was the first ashram established in Canada. Swami Radha was asked by her teacher to live on faith without working when she returned to Canada. Out of her dedication and courage, the Ashram grew into the flourishing centre it is today.

Swami Radha is a role model for other women and established a lineage of women leaders. Swami Radhananda was president of Yasodhara Ashram Society from 1993 through 2014, building on Swami Radha's work and creating her own legacy of outstanding leadership and innovative teaching. Swami Lalitananda worked closely with both Swami Radha and Swami Radhananda and became president of the Society in 2014.

Yasodhara Ashram Society has been a Canadian charity since 1963.

SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR

In 2019 Swami Lalitananda gave initiations to two long-term dedicated teachers of Swami Radha's work.

YASODHARA ASHRAM SOCIETY BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Our quarterly Board meetings provide dynamic interaction between the three on-site swami directors and the four directors living outside the Ashram. Together we monitor the overall functioning and health of the Society and look ahead to future initiatives as well as succession, financial and human resources sustainability.

Financial Overview



Over its 56-year history, Yasodhara Ashram has operated on the principle of renunciation and generosity—buying what we need when we need it, without overconsumption. We make our programs financially accessible—offering payment plans, course discounts, bursaries, scholarships and stipends. Donations help support youth, elders and people on limited incomes to access the Ashram teachings and community.

2019 Highlights

In 2019 the Ashram earned revenue from courses, fundraising, groups, residency fees, Karma Yoga programs, bequests and investments. Our financial focus this year was to stabilize the operational areas of the Ashram, which meant increasing the Human Resources budget to fill essential needs. The year ended with a lower-than-budgeted deficit and we were encouraged to see how our core programming income increased, indicating that the audience for our teachings is growing.

[Read 2019 Financials here.](#)



Future Directions



Writing from spring 2020—already a step into a future that we could not foresee in 2019—we have announced that programming at Yasodhara Ashram is closed for the rest of the year. Groups, day tours and outreach are also cancelled for 2020. We hope to re-open for the Yoga Development Course in January 2021.

In our 2019 strategic planning process we clarified what is essential to keep the Ashram an Ashram into the future. Does it depend on having swamis? Does it depend on the land itself? Does it depend on being a learning centre? What we came up with were concentric circles. In the very centre we agreed that the following are essential:

- Divine Mother
- The Teachings
- The lineage
- Commitment

As we move forward, we can hold true to our essential purpose even as we innovate and experiment with how to express it.

Some of our plans from pre-pandemic times are still valid. The Pathways Program to integrate more and younger residents with longer commitments is just as relevant now to create a sustainable future for the Ashram. The invitation may at first be limited to no more than 50 people on-site, and the initial stay may come with a two-week private retreat (or self-isolation if you prefer)—but that all sounds good!

And even as we're officially closed, the Ashram continues to be an active spiritual community with long-term residents and karma yogis living side-by-side and working together, supporting each other's talents and ideals, and doing our best to create the kind of world we want to live in. It feels like going back to our origins, a pioneering time, and giving ourselves the benefits of what we usually offer our guests.

But we are keen to teach. We keep in-house classes going here at the Ashram and we are now launching online programming, something we've considered for decades. Virtual satsangs and online classes are our new way to reach out to you, our extended community. We miss having you with us. Yet the advantages are—no travel, more accessibility. This method of teaching will likely continue as an alternative long after travel restrictions are lifted.

We continue to collaborate with other organizations and tap into some key questions for this time, such as: What will the post-pandemic world be like? What changes can we make now that will improve our organizations and break up systemic inequity and racism? Can we use this time of unknowing as a spiritual practice?

The Ashram is small and nimble enough to be resilient. We are eager to learn. We welcome change. We trust the Light. And we continue to question, What is this time about? What is this Divine Play?



Yasodhara Ashram

YOGA RETREAT & STUDY CENTRE

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SINCE 1963

We are a Canadian charity
and active learning centre.