

The Centered Place

Newsletter

March 2020



Namaste

In Roman times, March 1st was the first day of the year. Meteorologists consider March 1 the first day of Spring. Astronomers consider the spring equinox (March 19 this year) as the beginning of Spring. Historically, in the Northern hemisphere, with the winter frosts melting and the ground becoming fertile for food production, March was the time for farmers to return to their fields.

We can also consider March as springtime for our own growth – our spiritual growth. We have a nice field for you to “farm” on: a heated floor if needed, air conditioning, too. You can practice yoga and meditate in order to raise your spiritual harvest, bringing to light the best that is waiting within you – like a seedling ready to sprout. Please join us often this month.



Turn inward, dig in, March on and spring forth!

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Contemplation of the Month

You already know from previous readings that you are on the way to enlightenment. It can take many lifetimes to become enlightened, or you can become enlightened in this lifetime. You have the choice. The time it takes depends on the intensity and consistency of your practice and also on the people you choose to look up to.

The [contemplation article for March](#) is about the effects other people have on your life. The people you choose to hang out with make a difference. Being with unenlightened people, you are likely to be brought down to their level. Spending time with enlightened beings, you are going to be lifted up.

Gurudevi Nirmalananda says an enlightened being (a Guru) “sees you both as you are and as you can be. Most importantly, the Guru makes enlightenment accessible, should you so choose.”

How do you become enlightened? Gurudevi answers:

“In a Shaktipat tradition [the tradition behind Svaroopa® yoga and Svaroopa® Vidya meditation], you begin with a taste of enlightenment. You get that in every Svaroopa® Yoga class, especially after your final Shavasana. You get that in every Svaroopa® Vidya meditation, especially when you are first opening your eyes.”

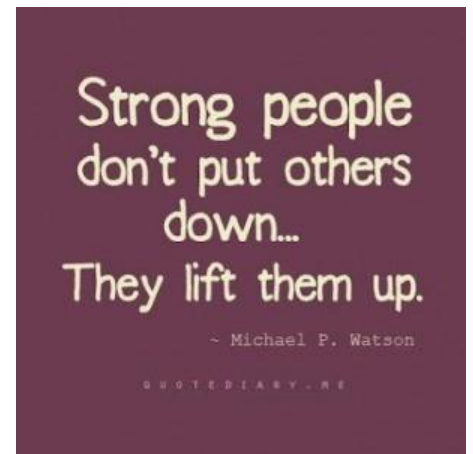
But the real beginning of the process begins with Shaktipat itself, and that comes in the presence of a Shaktipat master such as Gurudevi. She will be giving a [Shaktipat retreat in Boston](#) later in October this year. She also gives Shaktipat retreats at the Downingtown PA Yoga & Meditation Center.

The people you choose to be with do make a difference. If you want to be on the fast track to enlightenment, your best choice is to be with a Shaktipat master. In the meantime, do the practices that have been handed down to us by the masters: Svaroopa® yoga, Svaroopa® Vidya meditation, mantra repetition, and so forth. You can read more about this in [this month's contemplation article](#).

Charity of the Month: Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center Research



Memorial Sloan Kettering
Cancer Center



Memorial Sloan Kettering has been at the forefront of developing innovative pediatric treatments that prolong survival for children with neuroblastoma but don't cause debilitating long-term side effects. Yet, of all the cancers, funding for neuroblastoma research has the least support. The grandson of Ellan (Shanti) has neuroblastoma. The care he has been receiving from Memorial Sloan-Kettering has been exceptional.



You can donate with us. There is a donation can in the mudroom. You can also donate online. For more information about MSK neuroblastoma care and research, click [here](#). To donate on our fundraising page, click on the graphic on the right or copy the URL <http://mskcc.convio.net/goto/TheCenteredPlace> and paste it in your browser.

Last month, we raised \$100 for Angels Answer, Inc.

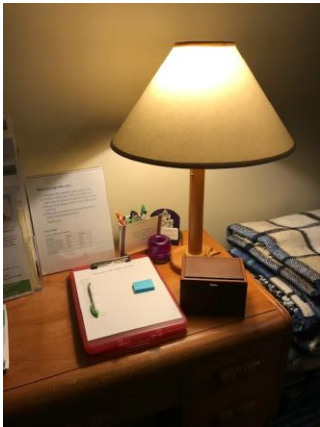
Class Schedule and March Calendar

For our class schedule see <http://thecenteredplace.com/classes/>.

For our March calendar, see <http://thecenteredplace.com/calendar/>

Flex Schedule: Some of you might not realize that you do not have to commit to the same class every week. Feel free to move around as your own schedule sees fit.

About Your Class Cards



When you sign in, please pull your class card from the wooden index-card box and place it inside the red clipboard. We'll stamp it at the end of the week. If you are coming more than once a week, no worries. Your class card will still be in the clipboard. Just sign in. We'll make sure the class card is updated to reflect your attendance.

When your class card is about to expire, you will see a post-it note reminder on it. If your card is used up and you come to a class and did not bring a check or cash to pay for a new class card, no worries. You do not need to pay for a drop-in class. The class will be marked off your new card when you do purchase it.

Birthdays This Month

We wish the following active students and friends a very happy birthday. We offer you a free class this month. Names in **bold** indicate students who are currently active.

Robert (Paj) Page (3rd), Susan Seibel (3rd), Belinda McKeon (4th), **Cindy Long (6th)**, **Kim Kenney (8th)**, Beverly Russell (12th), **Nancy Dedeian (13th)**, Dee Lillock (14th), Beverly Prestwood-Taylor (14th), Dee Blanton (16th), Sue Ramsey (16th), **Rebecca Daniels (17th)**, Rose Koerner (19th), **Carol Slater (21st)**, Terry Patrie (25th), **John Devanski (28th)**, **Jill Tirrell (31st)**



If you have a birthday in March and were omitted from this list, either we haven't seen you in a long time or we didn't have your birth information. If the former, come back! Renew your commitment! We'll be happy to receive you. If the latter, let us know the missing information. Thank you!

Flu: Don't Get Bugged

We are monitoring the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19) and doing all we can to respond appropriately. In our county, as of last Monday, only one case of this flu has been reported. Yet, anxiety and panic are spreading like a “panicdemic.” Caution is warranted, no doubt. But we urge you to keep calm as well as cautious. There is no need for panic. An outbreak is scary, but most people will experience COVID-19 as a mild illness. The main thing is to keep your immune system strong. Anxiety and stress may not cause illness directly, but they can weaken your immune system.

So instead of worrying, be watchful and do what you can to protect yourself. By all means, keep your sanity and stay calm. This is no time to jettison your practices. It's time to ramp up! Practice Ujjayi Pranayama, the breathing exercise we always start classes with. It boosts your nervous system and calms your nerves. Do more yoga. Meditate. These practices will support you and, ultimately, maintain your immune system's ability to fight back against disease.

What can you do? Health officials advise the following steps to protect you from the COVID-19 virus and other forms of flu as well as colds:

- Most important, wash your hands often with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains 60% to 90% alcohol.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with your hands
- Clean things that are frequently touched, such as doorknobs, using household cleaning sprays or wipes. Avoid touching door knobs or handles in public places: you can use gloves, your shirt, or paper towels.
- Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze. Use a tissue or your inner elbow, not your hands.
- If you are sick, keep others safe: stay home and avoid close contact with others. If you do get infected, let us know. Note: We will extend your class card expiration date for you.



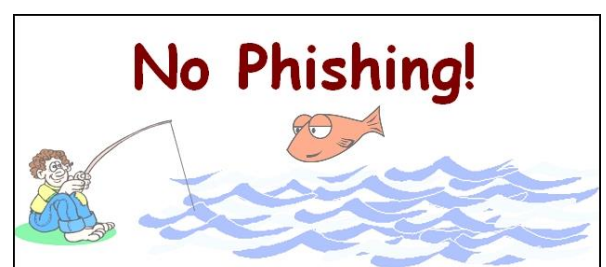
Resort to your Self, the source of well-being within. Do the practices that bring you to your Source: Ujjayi breathing, yoga, meditation, mantra repetition.

As Gurudevi once said during another time of turmoil a few years ago: **“Get a grip!** Get a grip on your mind and on reality.” She advises that you turn to insight instead of anxiety. “Look into Self, your Divine Beingness, and you will always have a divine answer even when circumstances are tough.”

Do not let your mind take you for a loop. Take control of your mind. You are the master. Maintain your mastery over your mind. Yoga and meditation are your main resources for mastering your mind.

Phishing: Don't Get Hooked

Sometimes I receive emails that are “phishing” attempts: malicious email that attempts to trick you into opening and engaging with it. The email appears to be sent from a reputable source but includes a malicious URL link in its body or a malicious attachment, such as a PDF or Word



document. If you click on the URL link, you are taken to a web site that appears legitimate but in actuality it is used to collect confidential information, such as your Social Security number, usernames and passwords, and charge card data. The attachment, when opened, might harm your computer by installing malware.

John Devanski has the following device. He is our webmaster who designed our new website, and he's also a dedicated student of ours.

“The number one thing everyone should do to avoid phishing attacks is never click on a link in an email. Go to your web browser, type in the ... URL yourself, and then log into your account from there.”

Yoga Helps Your Brain

Many studies over the years have shown that vigorous exercise strengthens the brain and helps build new neurons. Now scientists are catching up with yoga. Research at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign shows that practicing gentle yoga enhances the brain in the same way as vigorous, sweaty aerobics. The analysis, published in *Brain Plasticity*, focused on 11 studies of the relationship between yoga practice and brain health. Each of the studies used brain-imaging techniques such as MRI to evaluate outcomes of yoga practice.



The researchers concluded that the hippocampus, which is involved in memory processing and typically shrinks with age, increased in size with yoga. The hippocampus is the structure that is first affected in dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

The amygdala, which helps regulate emotions, also increases in volume with yoga practice. More importantly, activity decreases in the amygdala, thereby lessening the brain's fear response. Other regions that are larger or more efficient with yoga practice include the prefrontal cortex, which is essential to planning and decision-making; the default mode network, which is involved in planning and memory; and the cingulate cortex, which plays a key role in emotional regulation, learning and memory.

The University of Illinois kinesiology and community health professor Neha Gothe, one of the leading researchers, said yoga helps people with anxiety disorders (and without) manage their stress. “The practice of yoga helps improve emotional regulation to reduce stress, anxiety and depression,” she said. “And that seems to improve brain functioning.” For more information, see the Illinois News Bureau website at <https://news.illinois.edu/view/6367/805069>.

Meditation Helps Your Brain

In her recently published book *Science of Yoga*, Ann Swanson also credits meditation for keeping your brain sharp as you age. Recent advances in two key scientific areas of study – neuroimaging and neurochemistry – reveal the measurable changes in the brain that result from meditation and lead to improved cognition and mood.

Neuroimaging shows that just as exercise develops your muscles, practicing meditation strengthens neuroplasticity. Both meditation and yoga (asana) stimulate your brain, which helps prevent atrophy and functional decline.



Regarding neurochemistry, Swanson reports: “Your brain is capable of naturally creating key chemicals that pharmaceutical companies synthesize in the lab.” For example, meditation increases serotonin levels, without the side effects. Serotonin helps regulate mood, social behavior, appetite, sleep, memory, and more.

Swanson concludes this section in her book with the following:

“Meditation literally changes your neural configurations. Research suggests that meditation can be effective as an adjunct therapy for depression, anxiety, trauma, chronic pain, cancer, heart disease, and more. Better yet, it can help prevent many issues before they start. Meditation cultivates the neurobiology of optimal health and resilience. There’s a reason this practice has stood the test of time and why there’s been an exponential growth of research on meditation in the past few decades: It works.”

Upcoming Events and Special Announcements

- **Going with the Flow with Melissa (Yogyananda) Fountain,** Sunday March 22 10 am to 1 pm
Enjoy a Svaroopaa® Flow class: an active, invigorating class that does not tighten the spine. It combines the best of a traditional Svaroopaa® yoga class with the fluid sequencing of linked-together poses. *Choreographed Bliss!* **Early rate \$60 paid by March 14; \$70 after**



- **Next Free Newcomers’ Class** Saturday, April 18: 2 to 4 pm

- **Next Monthly Discussion Group**

We discuss the month’s contemplation article. This one-hour session gives you a chance to deepen and share your understanding of yoga’s teachings and how they apply to your life.

The last two or three months, we have not seen much interest in the discussion group. We will schedule a discussion when more people express interest. If you are interested, let us know what days and time of the day work best for you. We’ll try to choose a date that works best for everyone who responds.



Free Audio Recordings of Sadguru Nirmalananda Free audio recordings of Swami Nirmalananda discourses online. Listen from home or during your travels. Listen from your cell phone or PC.

<https://svaroopaa.org/audio-recording>

Swami’s new book *A Yogic Lifestyle* is now available on amazon or at the ashram’s [online site](#).

Enlighten Up!



1Thanks to Suzie Durand for this one.

Wisdom to Ponder



Follow us on Facebook and Twitter

Giving thanks to you, for giving us the opportunity to teach and support you! Love from us.

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