

Yogini has found peace and fulfillment

By BEV CEDERBERG
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The voice, soft and low, has a mermerizing quality as it flows across the room.

"Let the tidal wave of health engulf your mind, your body, your spirit. As you let this breath go, relax your face, your shoulders, your arms, your chest. Release slowly, and completely. Let go of everything that is not of this moment."

A calm penetrates each corner of the room. Women of varied ages, residents of communities stretching from Danville to Lafayette are stretched out on the carpet of a classroom in the Walnut Creek Methodist Church. The Church serves as meeting place for the Contra Costa YWCA.

The hurry and bustle of Christmas preparations is put aside. The soothing aroma of incense replaces the more familiar fragrance of cookies baking at home.

The moment speaks of calm.

Ramy Jyoti Vernon, yoga instructor and master teacher, leads her pupils through the classic asanas, or yoga positions, dispelling tensions as she talks of the unity between mind and body.

To her, yoga is the culmination of all religious and philosophical thought. It encompasses exercise, nutrition, relaxation and deep breathing.

"As a child," says Rama Jyoti, "I had a feeling of expectancy — there was something I was here to do. Now I

feel I am in the process of fulfillment. I may be doing what I am here to do.

"I am at peace. I'm so thankful I've been allowed to find my life's work in doing what I would do anyway. My play is my work and my work is my play. There is no separation."

With her husband, Oakland attorney R. Eugene Vernon, she has recently returned from a trip to India.

"They told me there I was a true yogini (the feminine for yoga.) It was really humbling."

While her husband was completing a study of Eastern versus Western laws, she was demonstrating Hatha Yoga in some of the great Ashrams of India. There were moments she felt as though she was "carrying coals to Newcastle" and yet she was awed to learn, when being awarded a certificate for proficiency in yoga at one of the leading Ashrams, or schools, that some had never seen some of the advanced postures she demonstrated.

"We went to India as the guest of a saint. In India, you know, they don't wait until you're dead to make you a saint. We were hosted by many of the wealthiest people in India, including a queen and a diamond merchant. I was asked to do demonstrations for members of Indira Ghandi's parliament, and to give a demonstration in an Indian temple.

"It made me realize one day the East will learn from the West. If only there could be an integration it would accomplish so much. There are areas in which we excel and vice versa. Technically and spiritually we could complement each other."

Ramy Jyoti Vernon:

*'I'm so thankful
I've been
allowed to find
my life's work in
doing what I would
do anyway'*

Her progression to the honor of being called a "true yogini" in India began in a home in which health was paramount, but in which she was physically ill.

The daughter of a Norwegian physical therapist and a Lebanese nature-pathic doctor, Rama Jyoti sees her parents as her first gurus.

"Mother and father both had offices in our home in Southern California. Many leaders in physical integration were guests in our home. Sister Kenney, Gloria Swanson, Adele Davis, Gina Ceminara. All of them.

"My father was such a health fanatic we were not allowed to have vaccinations. We were taught to heal pain with our minds.

"Even with all of this I was very sick as a child. I had a heart condition, arthritis, was fat and always tired. In fact, I was in such poor condition the schools didn't let me participate in sports.

"I had no energy. It was like living in a well of depression."

When she was 18, her mother took her to her own yoga teacher, an 84 year-old instructor. She learned the breathing so important to yoga, but drew back from the postures. She could not do them.

"I drew back and vacillated between the outer world and the inner world.

"One day I saw there was no difference."

It was then she began to work through the postures, found the experience "like a bonfire. It was all-consuming."

She looks back to those years and relates. "I was really very lazy. But very practical. I wanted one thing that would pull it all together."

Yoga — when she began experiencing the physical postures as well as the breathing — became that one thing. "It clicked," she says.

Aside, with a small frown, "You know you can't think away anger and depression. Yoga gives you a direct method to transform negative aspects to positive. We go slowly, slowly, to release the barriers in the mind as well as those in the body."

Her study of yoga continued at the Institute of Asian Studies in San Francisco. "It is still my base point," she adds, "and Dr. Chaudhuri, its head, is my fulchrum of spiritual exploration."

Still later, in Oakland, she was unable to find a qualified Yoga instructor.

"It was then I received a phone call from the Montclair Recreation Center asking me to teach a yoga class for teenagers."

She did. The time was right. Her work blossomed; an adult class was added.

Within a short time she was teaching 15 classes a week, driving from Danville to Burlingame, from Napa to Lafayette.

"I found I was never sick, could never allow myself the luxury of having a cold."

Her two children, son Adrian, and daughter Erin, the latter an adopted child of mixed-racial background are now 9 and 6.

Rama Jyoti laughs as she recalls their role in helping yoga strengthen her postures. "We used to see who could knock me down first from the headstand. And we had great fun as they played London Bridge when I did the arch postures.

"There is just no excuse for not doing yoga."

Today, she continues some basic yoga classes, such as that at the Walnut Creek "Y", but has expanded to teach yoga instructors in classes, through television, and privately. Students have come to her from Boston, Texas, Washington and Oregon. She is at work on a yoga text.

Each morning, at 5:30, she and her husband meditate together. Classes are now being formed in meditation, as well as Hatha yoga.

On Monday nights, she invites her students and friends to her home in Oakland for group meditations. On Friday, the Vernons are hosts at Satsang gatherings, sharing yoga and meditative experiences as well as insights from guests who are notables in allied fields.

For those interested in a book on Yoga, Rama Jyoti suggests "Yoga and Health," by Selvarjan Yeusudian.

Further information on the Contra Costa YWCA classes is available by phoning 939-9167. A new series of yoga classes, taught by Rama Jyoti, will begin in January.

