

# ASHTANGA YOGA CONFLUENCE

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वन्दे गुरुणां चरणारविन्दे सन्दर्शितस्वात्मसुखावबोधे ।  
निःश्रेयसे जङ्गलिकायमाने संसारहालाहलमोहशान्त्यै ॥  
आबाहुपुरुषकारं शङ्खचक्रासिधाणिम् ।  
सहस्रशिरशं श्वेतं प्रणमामि पतञ्जलिम् ॥

Om

*vande gurūṇāṃ caṛaṇāravinde sandarśita-svātma-sukhāvabodhe |  
niḥśreyase jāṅgalikāyamāne saṃsāra-hālāhala-mohaśāntyai ||  
ābāhu-puruṣākāraṃ śaṅkha-cakrāsi-dhāṇiṃ |  
sahasra-śirasam śvetam pranamāmi patañjalim ||*

I bow to the two lotus feet of the gurus, who have awakened the knowledge of my own true happiness,  
my ultimate refuge, acting like the jungle physician, for the pacifying of the delusion of the the poison of samsara.  
Who has assumed the form of a human up to the arms, bearing a conch, a discus, and a sword,  
with thousands of radiant, white heads, I bow to Patanjali.



*Nancy Gilgoff, Richard Freeman, David Swenson, Tim Miller and Eddie Stern. Photograph by Michelle Haymoz.*

*If we practice the science of yoga—which is useful to the entire human community and which yields happiness both here and hereafter—if we practice it without fail, we will then attain physical, mental, and spiritual happiness, and our minds will flood towards the Self.*

*The means by which the mind is directed towards the Self and prevented from going towards outside objects is what is known as yoga.... The word yoga signifies the means to the realization of one's true nature*

*just as the evening sun cools his [own] radiance, so will one who practices the third step of ashtanga yoga — āsana — be free from mental disturbance and so become stable-minded*

*Tritiya kalasto' ravih svayam  
samharate prabham, tritiyangasthito  
yogi vikaram manasam tatha.*

Sri K. Pattabhi Jois, *Yoga Mala*

THE FIRST ANNUAL ASHTANGA YOGA Confluence<sup>1</sup> featured five senior western students of Sri K Pattabhi Jois for a gathering in the spirit of Guruji's life and teachings. This historical event brought together people from around the world who share a love for Ashtanga yoga and offered them an opportunity to immerse themselves in the practice. The classic teachings of yoga date back over 5,000 years and have taken many turns to bring us to where yoga is today in the West. Pattabhi Jois sowed the seeds of this ancient practice in the West when he made his first trip to Encinitas, California, in 1975. Since then, the popularity of yoga has increased dramatically in America and abroad. In organizing the Confluence, we wanted to give special thanks not only to Guruji, but to all of our teachers who have helped carry on Guruji's teachings in America, continuing to pave the path. We also wanted to see if we could help support the Ashtanga Yoga community with a communal gathering to inspire

all of us, teachers and students alike, as we carry on this tradition to the next generation.

The event was held from March 1st-4th, 2012 in San Diego, CA at the Catamaran Resort & Spa. It was such a tremendous success, with 400 in attendance and 500 people on a waiting list. Encouraged by this turnout, we organized a second event for 2013, to take place from February 28th – March 3rd at the same venue.

Having participated over the years in other yoga events with many different styles and teachers, Jenny Bouwer and I came together to create an 'Ashtanga only' yoga conference. After putting together a comprehensive plan for a three and a half day event, we approached our teacher Tim Miller, and his wife Carol, for their thoughts and support. Depending on their response, we were prepared to either throw in the towel or move forward. We basically felt that without their knowledge and support, it would be impossible to proceed.

<sup>1</sup>con-flu-ence [kon-floo-uhns] noun: A flowing together of two or more streams. An act or process of merging. A coming together of people or things.



Tim Miller. Photograph by Tom Rosenthal.



We all agreed it would be an Ashtanga only conference rather than a mix of many different styles and teachings. Secondly, it would be relatively small – 350 to 400 students – with five primary students of Gurujī teaching, and several others as assistants. With this intimate-style group, students could experience mostly everything together rather than having lots of choices with different classes all going on simultaneously.

We asked Tim to choose whom he thought would be the best people to come teach for the event, and to his pleasure and ours, all the people he asked said yes:

“The first four names to come to mind were Richard Freeman, David Swenson, Nancy Gilgoff and Eddie Stern. These are all friends that I have known for at least twenty years, teachers that I have great admiration and respect for, and individuals with very different personalities and teaching styles. That great common ground among us is that we were all long time students

of Pattabhi Jois and devoted teachers of his method. Miraculously, all of the teachers I invited said yes.”

We also all agreed we wanted a more spiritual and meaningful name than “conference”. Tim and Carol suggested Confluence. In India, the location where two or more rivers merge is thought to be an auspicious place of spiritual power. In the same spirit, these highly respected teachers decided to join us in a confluence\* of classes, lectures, stories and events designed to share the profound gift of yoga they received from their beloved teacher, Sri K. Pattabhi Jois. Suddenly, the name Confluence was perfect. As a celebration of Gurujī’s legacy, like different streams from the same source, each senior western teacher received a thorough transmission of the ashtanga yoga system from Gurujī, filtered it through their own experience and developed a unique way of sharing his teachings.

PATTABHI JOIS, AFFECTIONATELY known to his students as “Gurujī”,

began practicing yoga in 1927 at the age of twelve with the great yoga master T. Krishnamacharya. At the age of 15, Gurujī ran away from home to study at the Sanskrit College in Mysore, where he was miraculously reconnected with his Guru. In 1937, Gurujī was granted a position as yoga teacher at the Sanskrit College by the Maharajah of Mysore.

Gurujī opened the Ashtanga Yoga Research Institute at his home in Lakshmiapuram in 1948. Over the years, Gurujī successfully treated cases of diabetes, asthma, polio, heart disease and even one leprosy case with a combination of yoga therapy and diet.

WHEN WE ASKED EDDIE TO GIVE US A summary of his experience at the first annual Confluence, he said:

“It is only by sharing teachings, retelling stories, and listening to each others experiences that the spiritual imperatives of a tradition stay alive and vibrant, and remain in the world for new generations of seekers to benefit from.



Eddie Stern. Photograph by Tom Rosenthal.

During the Confluence, this is exactly what we did. We told stories about Guruji, and we told our stories too, which form a part of him as well. We shared his teachings; we laughed, questioned, investigated, and at the very end, even cried a little. We did all of this out of love, devotion, and gratitude, which are the very things that the yoga texts proclaim are needed for a spiritual life.

The final mantras of the Rig Veda say:

*Meet together, talk together, let your minds apprehend alike...*

*Common be the prayer of these assembled, common be the acquirement, common the purpose, associated be the desire. I repeat for you a common prayer...*

*Common by your intention, common be the wishes of your heart, common be your thoughts, so that there be union among you.*

These thoughts are truly a divine aspiration; so hard to

achieve, but so worthwhile striving for. During our gathering, I think we came very close, if not all the way, towards entering into this space, and I am very grateful to have been able to sit along side Tim Miller, Nancy Gilgoff, David Swenson and Richard Freeman, who are among Pattabhi Jois's most talented and senior teachers, and for whom I have much love, admiration and respect, for this momentous occasion."

HAVING DAVID SWENSEN WAS A complete joy; he later wrote to us:

"For the five teachers: Nancy Gilgoff, Tim Miller, Richard Freeman, Eddie Stern and myself plus an equal number of assistants: Mary Taylor, Leah Nicole, Johnny Smith, Noah Williams and my wife Shelley Washington, we all felt Guruji's presence within the energy and breath during the practice sessions as well as a glimpse into a por-

tion of the heritage he left behind in the form of words, thoughts and remembrances shared during the panel discussions.

Many participants commented that they enjoyed the panel discussions the most of all. I personally felt so honored to be there listening to the other teachers, my friends, expounding upon the depth of their understandings of the practice, philosophy and life-tools gained from their decades of practice. It was a testament to the power of the system and also to the underlying thread of breath that connects us all. There were certainly differences of opinions on some topics but there was also a deep and resounding respect for each other. It was an important moment to acknowledge differences, accept changes and revel in the common love, respect and inspiration we each feel for each other and Ashtanga Yoga as a lifelong journey and valuable tool that we are all blessed to have been touched by."



David Swenson. Photograph by Tom Rosenthal.



**W**E WERE SO HONORED WHEN Richard Freeman said he could come to the Confluence. These five teachers together were illuminating. This was Richards's response to his experience:

"The Confluence was a delightful, flowing together of five different strands and interpretations of the same system, which Pattabhi Jois has passed on to us. I was struck (but certainly not surprised) by the easy camaraderie amongst all of the teachers, assistants, and most of all the amazing practitioners who came. It was nice to be in a conference-like setting where no one was placing an exclusive trip on anyone or trying to claim the entire art of Ashtanga yoga as their own; and in fact, this is what has always attracted me to the overall Ashtanga community.

Another thing which stunned me, was how funny all of the presenters were, and at the same time how down to earth and practical they were in their demonstrated

ability to really help students and practitioners of all levels and all ages. And even more stunning was the simple devotion that I found amongst the practitioners who were in attendance; their devotion to just practicing! Everyone was open and curious about all of the different limbs of the yoga tradition and it seemed that everyone was respectful of each other's unique methods and contributions.

The talks and panel discussions were inspiring to me because everyone had different wonderful insights into the fundamental priorities, techniques and philosophies of the yoga sutra and all were able to apply them to the here and now.

The devotion and love for Pattabhi Jois which spilled out of the presenters and many participants as well I believe would have pleased him to no end. The story telling and reminiscing brought back many memories, which I had forgotten and which keep taking me to that ecstatic and loving space which we all share. And last, but

not least, to have all of the organizers of the event participating in and understanding the yoga was a truly unique and refreshing aspect to the Confluence. I'm very happy and honored to have been part of it."

**W**E WERE THRILLED TO HAVE Nancy Gilgoff come to San Diego from Hawaii to reunite with her friends and teach us how she was taught. This is what she said:

"In 1973, when I was taught by Pattabhi Jois for the first time, he taught me in a "different" way than ashtanga yoga is generally taught, with fewer vinyasas and often joining groups of poses together."

We look forward to Nancy's 2013 class where she will share with us the practice as it was taught to her at that time. We are also thrilled that Dena Kingsberg, a student of Gururji's for twenty five years, will be joining us next year, from Byron Bay, Australia. We look forward to the second Confluence! ❖❖



*Richard Freeman. Photograph by Tom Rosenthal.*

NĀMARŪPA ASKED JENNY BOUWER ...  
WHY THE CONFLUENCE?  
HOW DID THE IDEA ARISE??

"TIM ALWAYS SAYS A YOGA PRACTICE is like a life well lived; in the end, if you have worked hard, you can rest peacefully, knowing that you have done your best. This is *Savasana*. As yogis, we practice this letting go and this surrender each time we finish a yoga practice.

I feel that the Ashtanga yoga community was brought together and was collectively deeply moved by Guruji's passing; thousands felt some heartfelt emotion in some way. His dedication to his lineage and his loyalty to teaching has been brought to light more now than ever. His passing has made his students and followers truly embrace the heart of the practice, its discipline and its purity.

The heart of the Confluence is to continue sharing and bringing together Ashtanga yoga teachers and students for the love of the practice, for the lineage of the teachings, and for the sacred knowledge from India, passed down for thousands of years. The purpose of the Confluence is to receive the teachings from the teachers who have come before us; we are here still practicing today so that we can all learn. The Confluence will begin to move to different locations around the world so that we can continue to come together to share, remember, study, and preserve the tradition and the purity of this method." ❖

PLEASE VISIT

[www.ashtangayogaconfluence.com](http://www.ashtangayogaconfluence.com)  
to learn more about the next  
ASHTANGA YOGA CONFLUENCE to be  
held in San Diego, California from  
February 28 - March 3, 2013.



Nancy Gilgoff. Photograph by Tom Rosenthal.



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स्वस्ति प्रजाभ्यः परिपालयन्तां न्यायेन मार्गोण महो महिशाः ।  
गोब्राह्मणेभ्यः शुभमस्तु नित्यं लोकाः समस्ताः सुखिनो भवन्तु ॥

ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः

Om

*svasti prajābyah paripālayantāṃ nyāyena mārgēṇa mahīm mahīśāḥ |  
go-brāhmaṇebhyaḥ śubham astu nityaṃ lokāḥ samastāḥ sukhino bhavantu ||  
Om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ*

May the rulers of the earth protect the well-being of the people,  
by means of the virtuous path.

May there be eternal good fortune for all living beings.

May the inhabitants of all the worlds be full of happiness.

Om peace, peace, peace!



Class. Photograph by Lena Gardelli.