

Mandala Yoga Ashram

Bringing yoga and meditation into our daily life
based on the teachings of the
Vigyana Bhairava Tantra

Prospectus

May - August 2017

Including retreats in May, June and August



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1.0 Introduction

All teaching will be conducted in Mandala Yoga Ashram which is an ideal environment for learning, assimilating and deepening the practices of the *Vigyana Bhairava Tantra*.

The title of this ancient text can be roughly translated as ‘Insight into Consciousness’ and is a manual of meditational practices which can be utilised in daily life to bring about a fundamental transformation in one's perception and level of energy. These practices are aids to centring Awareness even in the most mundane and seemingly worldly situations.

There is no need to disappear into a cave or escape the world. On a deeper level, there is no split between spiritual life and worldly-cum-daily life – they are both part of a Totality. We can use situations that we encounter in our day-to-day life as a means of awakening joy and insight into our identity as Awareness. The *Vigyana Bhairava Tantra* (VBT) shows us how.

The course will illuminate the original Himalayan context of the VBT and then introduce key¹ practices (in Sanskrit, known as *dharanas*) that can directly promote yoga and meditation in your daily life. You will be given systematic guided practice whilst within the ashram, together with ongoing support for your subsequent personal practice at home. In so doing, you will discover more of your hidden potential, bring a greater fulfilment to your life, and deepen your realisation of your fundamental identity.

This course is designed for both sincere practitioners who want to deepen their practice and for yoga teachers who want to be able to impart the knowledge and practices of the VBT to their students.

1.1 Aims

This course will:

- provide a comprehensive, accessible and inspiring training in key practices from the VBT so that yoga and meditation become an integral part of your daily life
- encourage each participant to go deeper in their experience of the practices in the context of their daily lives – and so undergo transformation
- offer yoga classes, *yoga nidra* (deep meditative relaxation) and *satsang* (question and answer sessions) to support the direct teaching of the VBT practices.

¹ In all, the VBT gives 112 different practices/ *dharanas* and it will not be possible in the time available to teach them all. Therefore the tutors will select the key ones that are felt to bring the greatest benefit to the course participants.



1.2 Objectives

By the end of this course all students will have:

- gained first-hand theoretical and experiential knowledge of selected VBT practices and how they bring a different quality to their self-understanding and daily life experience
- acquired sufficient competence to practise at home as part of their ongoing spiritual path
- had a shift in their self-identity
- gained the ability and confidence to teach the VBT practices to their students (if they are yoga teachers).

1.3 Course Prerequisites

- at least four years practice of yoga.
- a personal interview to ascertain suitability.
- If you are new to the ashram we would advise a prior visit before the course starts to gain an initial experience of the daily schedule and energies of the ashram. We do, however, accept that this may not be practical for those living a long distance away.

1.4 Course Requirements

Course participants will be required to:

- attend all three residential programmes at the ashram
- continue regular personal practice at home for the duration of the course.

1.5 Teaching Team

Course Director: Swami Nishchalananda Saraswati (Swamiji)

Swamiji will be the main teacher for the May 2017 retreat and will then offer guidance, to both tutors and participants, over the June and August retreats (without direct teaching) as the participants evolve in their practice.

Course tutors: Swami Krishnapremananda, Swami Atma and Maha Sattwa

See below – section 2 - for biodata of the teaching team.



2.0 Course Director



Swami Nishchalananda Saraswati is the Spiritual Director of Mandala Yoga Ashram which he founded in 1986. From 1971 – 1985, he spent 14 years in India where he studied and practised yoga under the direct guidance of Paramahansa Satyananda Saraswati. He gained a deep knowledge of all aspects of yogic and spiritual life, both theoretical and practical. During his time in India he came in contact with the teachings of the *Vigyana Bhairava Tantra* and realised that its teachings offered a practical means of helping modern man and woman to bring spiritual understanding into their busy lives. This inspiration remained with him when he returned to Europe in 1985 and since then he has initiated many practitioners into the experiential knowledge of this extraordinary text during the numerous courses and retreats he has given in the ashram and throughout Europe.

Inspired and guided by his guru, he wrote a number of textbooks on yoga which were, and still are, published by the Bihar School of Yoga, including *A Systematic Course in the Ancient Tantric Teachings of Yoga and Kriya*, regarded as a modern classic, *Meditations from the Tantras*, the original form of *Asana, Pranayama, Mudra Bandha*, among others. Since founding the Mandala Yoga Ashram, he has written a number of books including *The Edge of Infinity* and *Mantra Yoga and Ashram Chants*. His latest book is entitled *Insight into Reality – The Tantric Teachings of the Vigyana Bhairava Tantra*.

Other Course Tutors



Swami Krishnapremananda has been living, practising, serving and teaching in the ashram since 1997. He is a senior resident teacher whose yogic understanding has gradually matured over the years through sustained and dedicated practice under the guidance of Swamiji and other inspirational teachers. Teaching since 2001, he has given numerous classes and seminars on many aspects of yogic study and practice, including the *Vigyana Bhairava Tantra*, both within the ashram and elsewhere in the U.K. and Europe. He is the director of the ashram's Yoga Teacher Training Course. He conveys the teachings in a simple, clear and accessible way.



Swami Atma Saraswati was introduced to Hatha Yoga 40 years ago and has been a serious Yoga practitioner for the past 20 years. Before living at the ashram from 2004 to recently, she was a member of the Dharma Centre under the guidance of Swami Dharmananda Saraswati. At the ashram her guiding light has been Swami Nishchalananda Saraswati; and it was he who initiated her as a Swami in 2011. She has been teaching in the ashram, and in other venues in the U.K. and France for the past 10 years. Though she says everything is Yoga, she specialises in Yantra, Meditation and Yoga Nidra.



Maha Sattwa was a student of Swami Pragyamurti in London for several years before moving to the ashram in early 2013. She completed the ashram's one-year Kriya course in 2012 and graduated as a yoga teacher from the ashram's 2012-2014 yoga teacher training course. She has a wealth of knowledge and experience, which is growing through her ongoing contact with the ashram, and which she skilfully transmits to her students through her clear and uncluttered teaching style. She was also a tutor on the 2014-15 ashram's Chakra Training Course.

3.0 Course Content

Theory:

One of the basic premises of the *Vigyana Bhairava Tantra* is that we are not as physical or material as we think we are; our individual nature is based on creative energy – in Sanskrit, *spandan* – which exists everywhere and which has always existed; energy poised for creative expression and transformation. This concurs closely with the findings of modern science.

The teachings do not try to deny the world, or label it as mere illusion, but rather consider the world as a manifestation of energy (Shakti), the dynamic expression of Consciousness (Shiva, the fundamental Reality underlying all things). Nothing is rejected, and every situation has the potential to open our eyes to the wonder of existence and the wonder of our own being.

The *Vigyana Bhairava Tantra* is not so much concerned with giving us wordy intellectual answers but with giving us the techniques to attain the answers in our own experience. Direct perception removes doubt so that there are no questions. Spiritual life is not about endless debate but direct communion.



On the deepest level, our nature is Consciousness – which is qualitatively different from matter and energy. Yet if we can refine our energy, then this can be the catalyst for an insight into the nature of Consciousness itself. This is the purpose of the practices of the *Vigyana Bhairava Tantra*.

Practice:

Meditation requires no technique; it is spontaneous – but first of all you have to be on the point of being spontaneous. The practices of the Vigyana Bhairava help to remove blockages to spontaneity; they prepare the ground and thereby provide us with the launching pad to create a space inside for the flowering of abundant energy, insight and wisdom.

All of the practices are designed to calm the turbulent mind and to bring it into the present moment, for it is only in the NOW that the transformation of perception is possible. It is only the present moment that is pregnant with promise – the promise of identifying with and living in Awareness.

All of the techniques given in the text are non-moralistic and non-religious. Broadly speaking, the techniques aim to create a sense of spaciousness and a meditative state in moment to moment situations using the following as a focus:

- the breath
- body positions
- emotions such as love, frustration and anger
- mantra (specific sound vibrations)
- *bhavana* – feeling
- *vichara* - contemplation
- visualisation
- deepening our relationship with nature and natural phenomena

In each case, the practice points to the essence of our own Being, the Source of all perceptions. The external is not the Source of perception; the Source is always within us. Every situation is designed to bring us back to our own fundamental Identity.

These are the teachings and the practices of the *Vigyana Bhairava Tantra*.



4.0 Typical Retreat Programme

The typical programme for each of the three retreats on the course is:

Arrival Day:

6.15pm Supper
7.45 Introductory session

Other Days:

5.30am Awakening bell
6.15 – 7.40 Yoga class to cultivate spaciousness
7.50– .40 Morning chanting and VBT practices
8.45 Breakfast
9.30 – 11.05 Karma Yoga
11.30 – 12.45 VBT session
1.00 Lunch
Free time after lunch to rest, walk, reflect, interact or just Be.
3.30 – 4.30 VBT session and/or *Yoga Nidra*
5.00 – 6.00 VBT session
6.15 Supper
7.45 Evening session of VBT input/ Kirtan/ Satsang

Final Day:

The same as above until 1pm lunch, and then departure.

5.0 Duration and dates of the Course

The course comprises 16 full days spread over four months and three retreat periods as follows:

- initiation: five-day retreat from 9-14 May 2017
- a four-day retreat from 21-25 June 2017
- culmination: a one week summer retreat from 16-23 August 2017.

All the seminars are residential and include tuition, guidance, full accommodation and food.



Participants are very welcome to stay for extra nights before or after each retreat, subject to availability of accommodation. The night before and/or after will be complementary as part of the course fee, and other nights will be charged at the usual stay rate, currently £30.

6.0 Course costs

Course Fee: £1395

This covers all tuition and full board at the ashram for all the three retreats.

Deposit: £495

The deposit is non-refundable and should be received by the ashram office by May 1st 2017 to reserve your place.

Balance: £900

The balance is payable at the beginning of the course as one payment **or** 3 monthly instalments by direct debit of £300 a month on 01/06/17, 01/07/17 and 01/08/17 inclusive.

7.0 Application process

Places on the course will be limited to **20 people maximum**, and places will be offered on a first come, first served basis with no exceptions. Applications are invited from those who would like to commit themselves to going deeper in their understanding and practice of the VBT practice thus enabling a transformation in their experience of daily life. Applications should be made by Easter Monday, April 17th 2017 at the latest as per the following process:

1. complete your application form - available via the ashram website or the ashram office – and then send to the ashram office (see section 9 - contact details below)
2. you will be contacted for an informal interview should your application be considered suitable
3. following the outcome of the interview, a place will be offered if suitable
4. Your course deposit will then confirm your offer of a place, provided there is still availability within the 20 places on offer.



8.0 Further information

For further information please contact the ashram. We can put you in touch with any of the course tutors for an informal, no-obligation chat about the course.

9.0 Contact Details

Postal address:

Mandala Yoga Ashram, Pantypistyll, Llansadwrn, Llanwrda, SA19 8NR, U.K

Telephone: +44 (0)1558 685358 (office telephone hours are from 9.30-12 noon; at other times there is an answer machine.

Email: email@mandalayoga.freeserve.co.uk

Website: www.mandalayoga.net