

Raja Yoga Enhancements, Suggestions, and Corrections

In the Fall of 2017, I took the series of Raja Yoga classes given at the Ananda center in Palo Alto. It was *superb*. Well worth the time. Quite literally a *treasure trove* of ideas and inspirations that got me back to my practice and produced a *ton* of additional insights.

The series of 16 classes was based on two books, [Raja Yoga](#) by Swami Kriyananda and [How to Meditate](#) by Jyotish Novak. It also included a binder of additional notes. Both books were superb, as were the talks based on them and the practicum sessions that lead you through exercises to practice.

In other words, both the class and the books get my highest recommendation! They draw on ancient sources of immense wisdom, and do a great job in the process.

Nevertheless, there were areas that could be improved. In hopes that it is helpful, here are the areas I've identified. The listing identifies a few errors and makes some additional suggestions for improvement. (If the list seems long, consider that it was a 16-session course, each lasting 3 hours, and that the Raja Yoga book alone is more than 480 pages! So I'm talking about improvements to a small percentage of the material. But they're *critical*.)

Contents

How to Use These Notes	2
Raja Yoga Book	2
Hong Sau (error)	2
So-Hum only after Self-Realization? (error)	3
Medulla as Seat of Ego? (technically yes. In reality no.)	3
Cooling Breath (error)	4
Moola Bandha (error)	4
<i>Dhara</i> = “upward energy” (error)	4
Class Content	6
Two-Stage Energy Rise (important! <i>Emphasize</i> .).....	6
Yugas – (suggestion) there is a better explanation	6
Hong Sau – (error) the sound is not “imaginary”	7
Orbital Lift – (error) it’s not about the <i>focus</i> , but the <i>lift</i>	7
Tense/Relax Technique (suggestion) also good for <i>asanas</i>	9
Complete Breath – (suggestion) no <i>external</i> physical movements	9
Affirmation – (suggestion) <i>immersive</i> projection & <i>advance</i> gratitude	10
Immersive Projection.....	10
<i>Beyond</i> the Words.....	10
Advance Gratitude	10
Synchronized with the “Energy Breath”	11
Brain Plasticity – (error) it’s not “fixed” by age 35.....	11
Cooling Breath (error)	12
Cooling Breath (suggestions).....	12
Gratitude	13

How to Use These Notes

The best way to use these notes is to:

1. Go through the Raja Yoga book before class starts, and mark the items identified below in the Raja Yoga Book section.
2. Go through the notebook of handouts that accompany the class, and mark the subjects that are commented on here.
3. For each class session, after you read the chapter in the book and review the handouts, look up any related material here!

Following that process before each session will put you in the best possible position to get the most out of the upcoming session. My hope is that you get as much I as I did!

Raja Yoga Book

These are things that would ideally be corrected with an addendum to the book. Until then, it would be helpful if they were addressed in the Raja Yoga course notes and lectures.

Hong Sau (error)

In the Raja Yoga book, the sound is described as “imaginary”, which is undoubtedly the reason it is taught that way in the class. But the sound is not imaginary at all. It is quite real—and not all that subtle, if you’re breathing hard. (The more quietly you breathe, the more subtle it gets. But that’s a good thing. The more your breathing slows, the more intently you need to concentrate.)

There is value in mentally repeating the mantra along with that sound, of course. Nevertheless, the sound is quite real. Just as the Ujjayi breath makes a sound in the throat, so does a sound occur as the breath moves through the nasal passages.

It’s quite all right to imagine it until you hear it, but meditators should also be encouraged to *listen* for it. (See the additional notes below in the Class Content comments.)

Handouts in the Meditation section of the course notes also contain that error:

- *The Hong-Sau Technique*, in the section, “The Mantra”
- *Key Points for Hon-Sau*, in the section, “Mental Chanting”

References:

- p. 283: “Yogis say that on a *subtle* level this is the very sound made by the breath....To repeat Hong Saw *mentally*....Repeat this *mantra*, while watching the breath....Follow it all the way in with the *mental chant*...then all the way out with the *mental chant*...”
- p. 284: As you *chant Hong mentally*....As you *chant Sau mentally*...
- p.285: The Hong Sau *mantra*...
- p. 315:
 1. When the breath flows in...*follow it mentally with the sound*, Hong...

2. When the breath flows out...*imagine* that it is itself making the sound...

- p. 317:
 4. While *chanting* Hong Sau, be sure that you are *chanting only mentally*.
- p. 318:

Q. Should one concentrate on the breath and also at the point between the eyebrows?

A. (*No*) Not until the attention focuses itself naturally on the flow of breath at the beginning of the nose (where it joins the head).

The correct answer is: *Just listen to the sound, and see where it takes you.*
The error arises due to the misunderstanding of the technique. If you *listen* for the sound after you have been active (when it easiest to hear), and then ask yourself *where it is coming from*, you will find the practice to be quite enlightening, in that respect.

Note:

Everything else about Hong Sau said in the book (many pages worth!) and taught in the class is *excellent*.

So-Hum only after Self-Realization? (error)

On page 285: “Paramhansa Yogananda explained that one can legitimately reverse the Hong Sau mantra to So-Hum only after Self-Realization has been attained.”

I’m really not sure what he’s saying, here. What does it mean to “legitimately reverse” a mantra. In the Orient, the breath is considered as starting with the exhalation. Here in the West, we think of it as starting with the inhalation. So Hong Sau is appropriate here. Sau-Hong (or So-Hum) is appropriate in China.

To my mind, there is nothing wrong with doing it either way. Some days you play music American style with emphasizing beats 1 and 3. Other days, you play Reggae style, emphasizing 2 and 4, in contrast to the rhythm section, which is still on 1 and 3.

In my case, I originally learned Hong Sau as a spiritual-eye focus technique, and I learned So-Hum as a way to follow energy movements in the spine. Both were effective, for me—and one day, I’d really love to be “self-realized”.

Medulla as Seat of Ego? (technically yes. In reality no.)

On page 259, Kriyananda writes that the medulla is the seat of the ego. To do it, he quotes Yogananda—who said that it is *also* the seat of life force. Both statements are (conveniently) right there together on page 259. But I believe that the modern usage of the term “ego” renders the statement untrue, at worst—and at best, subjects it to misinterpretation.

As I write in [Is the Medulla the Home of Ego?](#), the answer is, well, yes and no. Yes, in a limited, clinical sense of the word, “ego”—which (I believe) is the way that Yogananda was using it at the time. But it is not true in the way that the term “ego” is commonly understood these days.

Cooling Breath (error)

On page 337, the book suggests taking in a cooling breath (Sitali Pranayama), and then *holding* it. As described above, that is not the way the breath is commonly taught, and there are good reasons to suggest that holding the breath is counter-productive. (See the notes below.)

Moola Bandha (error)

On page 406, this important technique is equated to Aswini Mudra, but in reality it is a quite different.

For a really accurate definition, see [Moola Bandha: The Master Key](#), by Swami Buddhananda. That is the definitive treatise on the subject. (And exquisitely short, as well!)

Note:

This correction has already been made in the handouts for the Palo Alto class practicum.

Dhara = “upward energy” (error)

This statement is made on p. 407, where Jaladhara Bandha (chin lock) is introduced. It says that *Jala* means the brain, and that *dhara* “signifies the upward pull of energy” to the brain.

However:

- A quick web search of “dhara” in Sanskrit turned up nothing useful.
- If it does have that meaning, it raises another question: Why do Jalandhara Bandha and Muladhara (which is a chakra, rather than a technique) have that name, while Uddiyana Bandha (another technique) does not, and other energy centers do not?
- The most useful definition I could find for “dhara” in the online [Sanskrit dictionary](#) was “holding, bearing, carrying, wearing, possessing, having, keeping (also in memory), sustaining, preserving, observing”, none of which are terribly helpful. (Significantly, neither Jalandhara nor Muladhara were included in the [list of terms](#) that contain “dhara”!)
- This [Yoga Journal](#) article gives “dhara = bearing, supporting” for jalandhara—a translation that would also make sense for Muladhara (root chakra).
- This [Yogapedia article](#) says that the Sanskrit term is a compound of *jal* (throat, or chin), (*dharan*) stream. But to be honest, my search of Sanskrit says that “jal” (or “jala”, because “ah” is an understood vowel when none are written) means water! And “sarit” means stream.
- It is conceivable, though, that if “jal” or “jala” means water, then it might also apply to a stream. But that leaves us searching for a meaning for “dhara”.
- On the other hand, [agnidhra](#) is “the function of the priest who kindles the sacred fire”. Agni is known to be fire, so “dhra” could be construed to mean “the act of kindling”. Of course “dhra” isn’t exactly the same as “dhara”, but it’s close. (And I find myself clutching at straws!)

- This [Chopra site](#) article gives *mula* as root, and *adhara* as “support, or base”.
- And that, at last, is a Sanskrit word I *can* find on [the web](#). The meaning of *adhara* is a “vehicle, or support, of consciousness”.
- [This page](#) suggests that *jal* might mean “net” (which is at least related to water). But given the difficulty of deriving any sensible meaning for the term, it goes on to say that, “*Rishi Jalandhar might have defined the act of this bandh* for the first time, and (so) it was named after him. (In Yoga, sometimes the actions are known by the name of the Rishis, such as Matsyendrasan, Gorakshasan etc.)”

Of course, the Raja Yoga book was written long before the advent of the internet! So when your teacher told you something, you accepted it and passed it on. My belief is that “Jalandhara Bandha” falls into that category, with people getting a clear meaning for one part of the word, and then making up a compatible meaning for the other part, and then passing on that “seemingly reasonable” explanation from generation to generation, for a very long time.

In the end, it seems clear that “jalandhara” has no clear meaning, so I’m inclined to accept that it was named after the Rishi (sage) who codified the practice.

Class Content

Two-Stage Energy Rise (important! *Emphasize.*)

This point is made late in the book, on page 309, and is only mentioned once:

“It is easier to draw energy up from the base of the spine in (these) two stages—first to the lungs and heart, then to the Christ-Consciousness center between the eyebrows—than (it is to do it) in one stage.”

That statement was *huge* for me, because it’s the first time I’ve seen a description that matches what I observe in my own practice!

For me, what happens is this:

1. As I *inhale*, I feel the energy rising up my spine.

- It feels like an energy wave that keeps pace with the [Breath Wave](#) described in the 2nd Raja Yoga session.
- Try as I would, I never felt it going any farther than the mid-to-upper chest, approximately at the top of the lungs! Until one day I noticed...

2. As I *hold*, I feel it rising further up my spine, to the center of my skull.

- Once I became *aware* of the energy flow, I noticed it moving further up as the breath was held.

The flow I observed in my practice, therefore, is nothing more or less than the “two-stage energy rise” described by Kriyananda.

In my opinion then, Kriyananda’s observation needs to be more pronounced in the course, if not in the book. It needs more emphasis, so students become aware of it earlier—because the first step in observing something subtle and easy to miss is *knowing where to look* for it. When you start looking in the right place, at the right time, it becomes a lot easier to catch the elusive quarry!

Yugas – (suggestion) there is a better explanation

The first session mentioned the *Yuga*, or “Great Cycle” — the cosmic cycle that is measured by the precession of the equinox, that takes nearly 26,000 years for one revolution. And it is said that we go through an advanced age of enlightenment, and descend again into a period of darkness, only to return once more, and so on.

Now the “explanation” given for the rise and fall of human consciousness during those periods is that the Earth is closer to the galactic center at some points during its travels and that, for some indefinable reason that negligible difference (on a galactic scale) somehow produces an age of enlightenment.

The issue, of course, is that the observation (accurate as it may be) lacks a causal connection! So unfortunately it doesn’t really explain anything—because it is unclear what kind of cause-and-effect relationship there could possibly be between the position of the earth relative to the galactic center, and mankind’s level of advancement.

On the other hand, it is possible that our sun is in orbit with a companion star. If so, that observation has the potential for a *lot* of explanatory power.

I've put together the best explanations I know here: [Explaining the Yugas](#).

Note:

None of this stuff described in that article was known at the time the Raja Book was written. And the understanding I have (such as it is) may well be supplanted by better explanations in the future! So this entire subject is nothing if not a “work in progress”—a work that may last several thousand years, at least.

Hong Sau – (error) the sound is not “imaginary”.

- There is no need to perform it as a mantra, “saying” it in your head.
- Breathe a little more deeply, as after exercise, and you will hear it.
- That’s one of the things that makes this practice so terrific, especially after exercise. At first, it is quite loud. As your breath abates, it becomes quieter and quieter, drawing your focus inward to hear it.
- And once you *hear* the sound, you can focus on hearing *where it is coming from*. That practice takes you straight to the spiritual eye.
- It is quite reasonable, of course, to *treat* the sound as imaginary until you hear it. But people should be encouraged to listen for it, rather than always being told to imagine it.

Orbital Lift – (error) it’s not about the *focus*, but the *lift*.

- The idea of “gazing at the third eye” is an ancient tradition. But as commonly instructed, it makes you go cross-eyed! Naturally, no one does it.
- Even the somewhat better instruction, “focus at the point between the eyebrows”, is misleading enough for most people to miss the point entirely.
- The very first class gave me one great tip: *Lift your eyes as though looking at the top of a faraway mountain*.
- The book gave me another: The actual focus point is “*in front of the forehead, at arm’s length*”. (The full quote is reproduced below.)
- Interestingly, that is *the same angle* you would use to gaze at the top of a distant mountain!
- The important point is that it is not about where you *focus* your eyes, or even what direction they’re pointed. The more important part is *lifting* them.
- Now, granted, that three-foot focus is pretty powerful. It quite nicely induces a focus on “spiritual connection”. There are physiological reasons for that, I think. But the fact is that you can’t very well go about your day looking at that spot! You’d run into a lot of doors.
- You can, however, *lift* your eyes—*throughout* the day.

- By “lifting”, I mean a slight contraction of the muscles above the eyes, as though you were pulling them upward.
- That technique is something I learned the very first day, and to say it is *powerful* is an understatement. It’s an antidote for depression, frustration, and every negative situation we encounter in our lives. It takes us up and out of ourselves and our circumstances, and moves us in the direction of divinity. And it’s something you can do *all day long, regardless* of what you’re engaged in.
- However, it is important to note that the technique I discovered was an *interpolation* from things taught in the class, rather than a direct application of what I was taught.
- My suggestion then, is that the whole idea of “gazing at the 3rd eye” (or gazing anywhere for that matter), should be augmented with the idea of “lifting the eyes”, *without* changing their focus, or even the direction they are looking!
- The actual 3rd eye gaze may still be useful in meditation (although for myself, I find that it tends to produce a headache). But the simple “lift” is something that can be done all day long to produce a more positive state of being throughout the day. (And, as the book suggests, it invites kundalini upwards. That doesn’t hurt!)
- Swami Kriyananda’s [Raja Yoga](#) book says it particularly well, on page 156. Here it is (with emphasis added):
 - *When you sit for meditation, look up toward the point between the eyebrows. I don't mean to cross your eyes, but only to direct your gaze upwards, focusing them at a point no closer than your thumb when held at arm's length from your body. You might **think of the eyes as being situated only in the upper part of their sockets.***
- That last part is particularly instructive: "Think of the eyes as being situated only in the upper part of their sockets." That is huge! Because that *is* the Orbital Lift. That's something I missed, the first 10 times I read it, but it is utterly descriptive.
- Note too, that when your "eyes are in the upper part of their sockets", it doesn't *matter* which way they're pointed, or how far the cornea is tensed to establish the point of focus. What *matters* is that the eyes are in the upper part of their sockets!
- That is the most important part of the instruction, and *that* is the Orbital Lift.

Note, too, that on p. 156, Kriyananda also says:

*As you meditate, focus every perception at the point between the eyebrows.
(Actually, of course, the frontal point of the brain that you should stimulate by concentration is behind the bone.)*

Unfortunately, the passage is another example of “When I say *this*, I actually mean *that*.” So when you hear me say *this*, what you actually need to do is *that*.”

He is in good company when he does that of course. The technique has been taught in that manner for literally thousands of years. And for that same period of time, I would argue, the majority of humanity has been misled!

Because the fact is that “lifting the eyes into the upper portion of their sockets” *does* achieve the desired stimulation. It does so in the same way that other techniques involving muscular tension work to activate a variety of energy centers in the body.

When talking about a *direction* for energy flow, “the point between the eyebrows” is a useful phrase. But when talking about a technique to stimulate the energy center, it isn’t. The pity of it is that we have not used more accurate wording for the last few thousand years. Had we done so, who knows how far humanity would have advanced? (It might even have allow humanity’s *spiritual* advancement to match its *technological* advancement.)

Tense/Relax Technique (suggestion) also good for *asanas*

This technique was taught as a relaxation technique, to let go of tension in the body.

It is certainly good for that. But it is also a good technique for *asanas*. Because if *asanas* do anything at all, they increase muscle tension!

And as Kriyananda points out on pg. 261 of Raja Yoga, [Muscle Tension → Energy Flow](#), when you release the tension!

It helps to turn an outward *physical* practice into an internal, *energy-flow* practice.

Complete Breath – (suggestion) no *external/physical* movements

This one is suggestion, because most every program I’ve seen teaches the 3-part breath as a collection of outward physical movements.

Many do the abdomen, then chest, and then they’re at a loss! Some suggest lifting the clavicle. Others suggest lifting the shoulders! (As though that movement expanded the lungs in any way, shape, or form!)

Ananda gave the best instruction I’ve seen to date, with a focus on abdomen, then ribs, and then chest. But it was still focusing on external physical movements.

But there is a better way to do it—something I now understand *because* of the course:

- Heidi introduced the idea of the “Breath Wave”, and she was the first teacher I’ve ever encountered who focused on the expansion of the ribs to the side—a movement I first discovered in my martial arts practice, but have never seen discussed by anyone, until Heidi mentioned it.
- Kshama mentioned isolating the diaphragm, and feeling it expand. That too, was a first. I haven’t heard the middle-section of the breath described in that way before. (It made me aware that I *could* isolate the diaphragm, and *feel* it.)

Together, those two gave me an understanding of the *real* “Complete Breath” technique, or what I call the “Subtle Yogic Breath”:

1. Breathe into the “belly balloon”. The outer abdomen moves *very little*, if at all. Instead, feel the balloon expanding *inside*, growing out and down.
2. Breathe into the “center balloon”. Start by feeling the diaphragm expand as you breathe in. As the breath grows large, feel the ribs expand to the side.
3. Breathe into the “chest balloon”. The chest doesn’t move. Just feel the balloon

expanding in your chest.

4. Put that sequence into a “Breath Wave”. Feel the energy rising up the center of your body, keeping pace with your breath. When you exhale, feel a “relaxation wave” traveling down your spine.

Affirmation – (suggestion) *immersive projection & advance gratitude*

Session #10 focused on affirmations. The sequencing was terrific, because first we covered energization, and then magnetization, both of which are critical to the affirmation process. So by the time we got to the affirmations, we were prepped for success!

My two thoughts for improving the process are *immersive* visualization, and *advance* gratitude.

Immersive Projection

Visualization was mentioned as one of the requirements for an affirmation. But “visualization” sounds like something you “see”. It is better to construe it as something you “imagine”, but even that does not go quite far enough.

My thought is to describe the process as one of *immersive projection*. You “set the scene” as though creating a video game, and then *immerse* yourself in it – projecting yourself into the scene so you *experience* it as reality.

Beyond the Words

The same holds for all of the affirmations given in the Yoga asanas and energization practices. As I wrote in [Affirmations and Asanas](#), it’s not about the words that are being used. Rather, it’s about the reality the words are pointing you to!

As I mentioned to one of the teachers, *the words are just a reminder of the reality you’re conjuring*. Because the process is nothing less than a form of mental alchemy. You are bringing something new into the world, conjuring it from thin air, in partner with the spirit that underlies all things!

Advance Gratitude

During the practicum portion of Session #8 (magnetization), we were instructed to experience the feelings that come with fulfillment, and to generate gratitude for “what we have”.

The intent was certainly good. The idea of “experiencing the feelings” was intended to create a more immersive projection into the vision—to *be* there, rather than to be *thinking* about being there. And gratitude is a powerful way to generate the energetic pump.

But [Advance Gratitude](#) is an even more powerful way to achieve both goals. As I wrote in the [Anti-Procrastination](#) meditation that was precipitated by these inspirations (for which, once again, I am *extremely* grateful):

In any affirmation process, *expectation*, *immersive projection*, and *spinal energy* are critical. [Advance gratitude](#) is produces all three!

- Gratitude is a high-frequency energy that “primes the spiritual pump”. It gets the energy flowing, and sets the stage for enlightenment.
- To be grateful for something that has yet to occur is, at some deep inner level, to expect it to occur.
- Being grateful also means that your projecting yourself into the vision emotionally, as well as — or even *instead* of — mentally. (When you’re emotionally grateful, you know it has occurred. You’re not particularly concerned with *how* it occurred, or *what form* the gift took. You may not even be particularly concerned with *when* it occurred. You just know in your heart that it *has* occurred, and you are grateful.)

Synchronized with the “Energy Breath”

One item mentioned in the Raja Yoga text, but insufficiently stressed in the class, is that *affirmations are most effective during the pause after exhaling*. That observation is so huge, I can’t begin to tell you!

And once you begin with that observation, there is *much more* that you can do:

1. Recognize that energy flows up your spine, keeping pace with breath so, as you’re inhaling, it only goes as high as your upper chest (heart region, top of lungs).
2. If you *observe* that pulse of energy flow, you’ll notice that *it continues upward during the pause*, after inhaling.
3. When it arrives, there is a strong pulse of positive emotions. *That is the time to generate advance gratitude*. The energy you generate and the energy-sensations you perceive then feed off of one another in an upward, self-reinforcing spiral.
4. As you exhale, you’ll feel a “relaxation wave” (sort of inverse energy pulse) traveling down the spine. It goes as far as the dantien (behind the navel).
5. *During the pause* after exhaling, *it continues down*, to the root. That is the time for your *affirmation / visualization / immersive experience*.
6. You may recognize, at this point, that at the root you are *creating* reality, and at the spiritual eye, you are experiencing the benefit of that reality—perceiving the sensations that come with it, and generating gratitude for them.
7. In between, *without any conscious effort* on your part, *the affirmation is moving through the chakras*. In the process, it attunes *every aspect of your being that needs to be attuned* to make that vision a reality.

Brain Plasticity – (error) it’s not “fixed” by age 35

- The talk on Affirmations in session #10 relayed the “old truth” that science used to believe — that 80 to 90% of the brain is “fixed in place” by the mid-30’s.
- The truth, of course, is that while it may be *epidemiologically* true (based on population measurements), it is not *intrinsically* true. In other words, any “cementing” of the brain that occurs is not an intrinsic characteristic of the brain itself, but rather a matter of how it is operated by its owner.

- Instead, it is now known that the brain continues evolving throughout life, to accommodate new demands, which is why the “young at heart” keep learning all their lives. They do it *because* they’re young, and it *keeps* them young, mentally.
- In the next talk, Navaashen gave the correction. But the original talk really needs to be revised.

Cooling Breath (error)

The teaching of the “Cooling Breath” contains an error—an error which is not very serious, given the fact that almost no one ever does this particular breath.

As it said to do in the book, the practicum advised taking in a cooling breath, and then *holding* it (p. 337). It is not taught that way in other disciplines, however, and the cooling effect will not be as pronounced when performed in that manner:

- We know from that very section (p. 336) that is the cooling effect of air coming *in* through the nasal passages that cools the brain. (Air going *out* is notably absent from the description.)
- We know from the “breath mindfulness” practices that the air is cool when entering the nostrils, and warm when leaving.
- The air is warmed as it held in the lungs, where heat is exchanged with the body.

It is therefore counterproductive to *hold* the cooling breath for any significant length of time! Anything more than a momentary pause will send warm air through the nasal passages and negate the cooling effect.

In contrast, [in this video](#) Ester suggests “hold for just a second or two at the top of the breath, just to feel it” and then after exhaling, “just stay empty for a second or so”.

Cooling Breath (suggestions)

Whether inhaling through the nose or with the curled tongue in the mouth, the Tantra practice of exhaling through the mouth should be encouraged, for the purposes of cooling.

That circular breath (in through the nose, out through the mouth) is useful in a number of ways:

1. It’s cooling, as air warmed in the lungs comes nowhere near the brain.
2. It’s useful when doing physical activity.
 - The need to breathe is motivated mostly by the need to expel CO₂ that has collected in the lungs.
 - That’s one reason that divers are taught to slowly exhale, in order to stay under water longer. (In addition to helping to avoid the bends.)
 - It allows a greater volume of air to be expelled—which is something you need when engaged in physical activity.
 - At the same time (if the activity isn’t too extreme), you can filter all of the incoming air through your nose, and warm it before it gets to the lungs. That keeps your throat from getting sore in cold weather.
3. Should you ever play the Australian diggeridoo, that is the breath you need. :_)

Additional Note:

It was mentioned that some people have the ability to curl their tongue, and others don't. The teacher looked at me, and said I could. But nothing could be further from the truth! If I try to curl my tongue, it stays flat as a table!

In short, whatever muscle or nervous-system capability is required for the tongue to perform that movement on its own, I don't have it! But it *looked* like I did.

Now, to my mind, "performance art" is mostly a matter of how many people you can fool into *thinking* you're good. It's not about being good or bad on any kind of absolute measure. It's about being *good enough*.

On this occasion, I was good enough—and it was all thanks to a terrific bit of instruction given in the Raja Yoga book.

The instruction (one I had never seen before) was this:

*Rather than projecting your tongue past your lips,
put the tip of your tongue on your lower lip.*

That instruction made all the difference, for me. With my tongue in that position, the corners of my mouth were able to exert sufficient force to curl the tongue!

Once curled, I can even move the tongue a little further out, so it extends a little past the lips, and maintain the curl. That's pretty cool. But it's not something I was able to do until I read that wonderful little of instruction in the book!

Gratitude

Given 14 pages of "suggestions for improvement", you would think I have nothing but criticism for the course! Far from it. The course is one of the most powerfully beneficial things I have done in my life. I am grateful for it.

The *reason* I have so much to say—and at the same time, the reason I benefited from the course—is that I was trained in a "parallel tradition". The tradition I trained in ([Ipsalu Tantra Yoga](#)) also stems from Babaji. Both traditions share a common root, in Sri Yukteswar. But from there, the lineage differed.

Given the word "Tantra" in that organization's name, you might expect it to be "sex-friendly". And it is. But it is not focused on sex. Not at all. Instead, it is focused on spiritual growth, energy-flows, and "cleaning the spirit".

I mention these things not to promote the program, but only to be clear about where I am coming from! And given that Paramhansa Yogananda was teaching in America in the early 1900's, it is no wonder that sex was a minimal part of the curriculum! (On the other hand, it is one of Ananda's great strengths that it doesn't spend an inordinate amount of time on things you "shouldn't" do. It gives you options and helps you feel good about yourself, *whatever* you do. And as a product of a Western religious upbringing that, too, is something for which I am very grateful!)

In Ipsalu Tantra, progress is made during lengthy sessions that last anywhere from a weekend to several days. That sort of program stimulates a great deal of growth—but

much of it is temporary, unfortunately. Lacking the kind of weekly stimulus that Ananda provides, it is all too easy to lapse between sessions.

So I am grateful to the Raja Yoga program for giving me a weekly “booster shot” of spirituality. I am grateful to the instructors for their energy and patience, grateful for the devotion of the staff, and grateful for positive intent of the many participants. And I am grateful to the program for showing me many things that I never learned in my Ipsalu practice.

At the same time, what I *did* learn in my Ipsalu practice was extremely beneficial! It includes some things that aren’t covered in the course, and some that are. (For example, the Moola Bandha technique, which I learned there originally, after which I acquired the Moola Bandha book and deepened my understating. The understanding I was able to bring to the course from that experience has *already* been incorporated into the practicum notes—for which I am both honored and grateful!)

So the suggestions I’ve made here, and occasional correction I’ve alluded to, have their basis in that training, and in the insights acquired in meditation since then—insights which I largely consider to be “downloads from Babaji”.

During the years I was practicing regularly, questions occurred, as well as insights. Several of the insights were confirmed in the course, and several of the questions were answered. For that, too, I am deeply grateful.

But mostly, I am grateful for the things I never really learned during my previous forays into spiritual territory. To name just a few: The value of the Orbital Lift; The right way to do Jalandhara Bandha (chin lock)—which turns out to promote energy flows *nicely*, when you do it right; and the mention of the Navi Kriya technique.

Those are just a few of the things that I discovered in the Raja Yoga course. But they were *huge*. The Orbital Lift and Jalandhara Bandha were “worth the price of admission”, to me. So (in hopes that I am not beating the drum too loudly) I am grateful.

Finally, my apologies for the length of these notes. Brevity has never been my strong suit. *Accuracy*, however, *is*. I am nothing if not “devoted to detail”. So if these notes find their way into your hands, know that I am grateful to you for taking them into account as you go through the course—and that I am grateful to Ananda for *continuing* to deliver the course, which can be of immense benefit to humanity. Know too that, most of all, I am *extremely* grateful for the benefits I have personally derived from my participation in it.

Eric Armstrong
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About Eric

Eric’s spiritual journey began in 1989, after a failed start-up attempt. He was in a live-in martial arts training program for 8 years, was awarded a black belt, and has taken extensive training in Ipsalu Tantra Yoga and multiple Yoga disciplines. Look for his upcoming book on energy-flow yoga and meditation asanas at Amazon.