

Egypt's second International Yoga Festival

March 24th to 31st 2007

Taba Heights – Sinai

The closing words in my report on the Egypt's First International Yoga Festival were:

"T.E.N Tours are now planning the second international festival.....it will be well worth attending."

Little did I know how true those words would be.

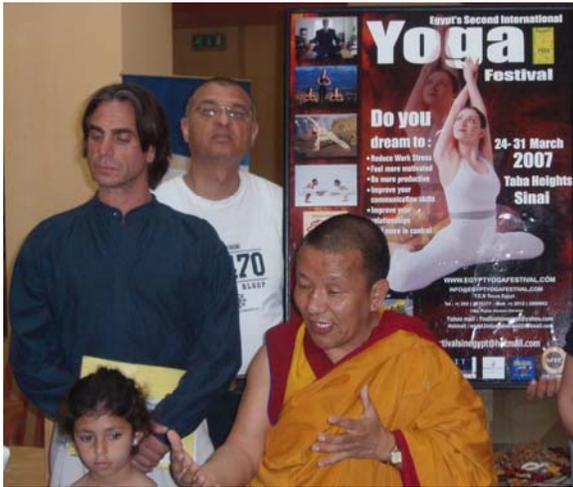
T.E.N. Tours took feedback from the first festival, retained what made it special and then went on to

improve it by so much. To do so **Hossam Darwish** (pictured left in glasses) engaged the services of **Anthony Sadasiva** (in blue shirt) as consultant with his extensive experience of such events and a wide & varied portfolio of contacts. They are seen here with Lama Tensing at the Mandala ceremony, more about this later. The fortunate attendees at this year's festival had a truly memorable experience. With people coming from Brazil, US, UK, Italy, Germany, Holland, Austria, Spain, India, Tibet, Israel and Jordan as well as Egypt, it was certainly international. The aim of the festival was to bring together highly experienced, multi-dimensional and distinguished teachers from several continents to share their knowledge in an open atmosphere. Festival participants of all levels were able to explore not only their own practice but to experience diversity in the differing threads of Yoga teachings; gain knowledge and understanding of it's philosophy and science; expand their own creativity and spirituality and most of all to Unify in the quest for 'Global Peace'.

Last year Heather and I flew direct to Hurghada so saw nothing of Egypt other than El Ghouna and the road to the airport. This year we took up T.E.N. Tours kind offer of arranging a trip to the pyramids of Giza on the Friday before. To the right is the view from our hotel window first thing in the morning with a sandstorm brewing. We had to leave by 7am, the early breakfast was accompanied by laughter and hugs as old friends (many from the first festival) reunited.

These pyramids together with the Sphinx are the last surviving members of the Seven Wonders of the World. To the left is the smaller pyramid of Menkaura, in the centre the Great Pyramid of Khufu (or Cheops). This is the *Pyramid which is the Place of Sunset and Sunrise*.

To the right is the Pyramid of Kafhre (son of Khufu). These were built during the Old Kingdom which lasted from the 4th to the 6th dynasty (about 2613-2181BC). They are located in and around the old capital Hwt-ka-Ptah (Memphis). We crawled up through tunnels for over 50 metres to reach the burial chamber of Khufu. Normally one is only allowed a few minutes in the chamber, but Waffa Ahmad negotiated us a whole hour to sit in the chamber and chant (photography is not allowed inside). We took



it in turns to lie in the king's sarcophagus and chant OM. You could get the whole sarcophagus to resonate. When Guru Dileep lay in the sarcophagus, Nivedita his 18 month old daughter burst into tears even though she must have seen her father lay in Savasana many times. How did she understand the significance of a sarcophagus ? We walked across the plateau and down to see the Sphynx with the pyramids behind. As we left the sand storm that had been brewing all morning came in and totally obscured the view.

I have a personal affinity with the pyramids. For many years I lived in the county of Wiltshire in the UK. Just south of my home was Stonehenge from where the 'Curved Ware People' set out to warn people of the impending comet strike of 3150BC. This comet caused the tsunami reported as Noah's flood in the bible and described in rather more detail in the Book of Enoch found amongst the Dead Sea scrolls. The stories of Deucalion in Greek literature and Ziusudra in Sumarian history, both builders of arks, record the same event. There is a theory that the measurement system the Curved Ware People demonstrated to build a henge and track the comet was later used to build the first pyramids in 2800BC.

French architect Jean Pierre Houdin has recently put forward a theory on the construction of the Great Pyramid, suggesting that it had been built using an internal spiral ramp, rather than an external ramp as had long been thought. It has been estimated that an external ramp would have taken 10 years to build using as much material as the pyramid itself and the pyramid another 20 years. He has proposed an investigation using non-invasive techniques.

The following morning we set off for the 450 km drive across the central plateau of the Sinai Peninsula to Taba Heights. I was thoroughly looking forward to my first drive across the desert particularly remembering the historical significance of Sinai as the only land link between Africa and Asia. Wafaa has provided a fuller explanation of this significance:

Sinai is said to signify the history of all the religions, all kinds of meditation & talking with God. Its stones, mountains, land all are sacred. Indeed, the land there is a monument to the antiquity of life on Earth, from the fossilized reef animals of [Ras Mohammed](#) to the mines of El Maghara, whose copper fueled the Bronze Age. In many places visitors from thousands of years ago literally recorded their passage in stone, as at the Rock of Inscriptions near [Dahab](#). And at [Serabit El-Khadem](#), near ancient mining sites, archaeologists have discovered carvings that record the very earliest emergence of our alphabet.

All three of the West's great religious traditions--Judaism, Christianity, and Islam--know Sinai as a holy land, a vast expanse traversed time and again by prophets, saints, pilgrims, and warriors. Sinai is most familiar to many as the "great and terrible wilderness" through which the Israelites wandered for forty years. However, it was also the path by which Amr Ebn El Ass swept down into Egypt in 640 AD, bringing Islam in his wake. Even after the Muslim conquest, the monks of [St. Catherine Monastery](#) (founded in 547 AD) continued to greet pilgrims to the site of the Burning Bush.

Many of the most memorable conquerors have passed through Sinai as well. Alexander the Great crossed at the head of a great army, as did Ramses II, Napoleon Bonaparte, and (in the opposite direction) Salah el-Din. In recent years, and for the first time, the history of Sinai seems to be emerging as a story about the land itself--its artifacts, its people, and its extraordinary natural beauty--rather than the story of those who pass through that land. Today, it is the Sinai's brilliant coral reefs, its striking mountains and deserts, Sea and its enormous [cultural heritage](#) that hold the future--once again, though in a very different way, the history of Sinai seems to be written in the land itself.

The plateau rises to 1000m permeated by deep *wadis*. It has a rugged beauty, mountainous with coarse sand and in many areas there was a thin top layer of black over yellow sand which showed up the tracks of vehicles clearly. The occasional sightings of a lone Bedouin with a small herd of goats made me wonder what it must take for man and beast to survive in such austere surroundings. Most of our journey was overcast and cool with a light shower of rain towards the end. The height of the plateau first became evident as we wound our way down a steep wadi to the small coastal plain on the Gulf of Aqaba on which sits the Taba Heights complex. This view from the mountain shows our hotel, the Hyatt Regency, in the foreground with the Sofitel on the far side.



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On reaching the **Hyatt Regency** we were greeted by Hossam Darwish the General Manager of T.E.N. Tours and Nikki Priestley the PR and Marketing Coordinator for Taba Heights from Orascom who own the complex. The yoga festival was Hossam's vision and despite still recovering from a recent heart attack, he was there to ensure its success, *a remarkable man*.

Before moving on to the festival itself, let's take a look at the significance of our location. From the beach we could see Eilat in Israel to our left, Jordan directly in front and Saudi Arabia across to our right. Like El Gouna, that hosted last year's festival, Taba Heights is a resort built by Samih Sawiris' company Orascom. At the time many thought it was a folly, but Sawiris saw the potential, this has been borne out by the success of both resorts. The Hyatt Regency was



the first hotel on the site evident in the maturity of its beautiful gardens. The hotel was designed by American architect Michael Graves and is built using traditional Egyptian construction methods and materials. Brick is first covered in concrete and then a mixture of gypsum and a variety of different coloured pigments. These are designed to weather over time to the tones of the frescoes *Graves* knew as a student in Italy. Just a few years after opening, parts of the façade have already faded in the desert sun and winds of the gulf, bearing the aged look he was seeking to attain. The great



variety in the forms and detailing of the hotel create a unique environment that fits so well with the mountain backdrop and waterfront context.

So lets move on to the festival itself. It was good to see so many people from last year as well as new faces. The opening ceremony took place in a Bedouin encampment in a wadi beside the hotel. We were treated to an evening of Bedouin music and dance as well as introductions to the teachers for the week.

We started at 06:00 each morning with meditation on the beach just after sunrise. Despite the heat of the day, there was frequently a chilly north wind on these mornings. Then followed yoga classes at 07:30, split into Beginners, Intermediate and Advanced. After breakfast there would be a lecture and a



workshop, further lectures and workshops followed lunch. The evening began with another yoga class, meditation before another lecture and dinner. All in all a very full and fulfilling day. With such an impressive line up of teachers, Heather and I decided to attend classes from them all as well as her running her own classes.

We made a good start with the Kundalini class of **Lila Leuzzi** from Brazil. Shayna Samuels, one of Lila's students from New York, describes her introduction to Lila (on www.yogabrasil.com) as "Not



long ago I met an angel in Manhattan". It did not take us long to understand what she meant. Kundalini is a very spiritual form of yoga inclined toward meditation and seeking a higher state of consciousness. *Kundalini* is the name given to the energy that lies dormant at the base of the spine. This form of yoga seeks to awaken this energy (likened to a sleeping serpent) and to release the dormant power within each and every one of us as we get in touch with the core essence of who we are. Lila makes great use of sound with mantras often accompanied by her playing a Shurti Box which is a reed drone instrument like a simple harmonium.

At other times she uses gongs, swinging them through the air so the sound combines with the breeze to form a powerful energy that you could feel running through your entire body as you sat and meditated or lay in Savasana.

Jayadev Jaerschky is originally from Germany, but is now a member of the Ananda community near Assisi, Italy, www.ananda.it. He is recognized as one of Ananda's main yoga, meditation, and philosophy teachers and is the co-director of the Ananda Yoga Teacher Training courses. Jayadev is a good friend of Norbu Oberdorfer who taught at last year's festival. Ananda specializes in community living and in applying spiritual principles to every aspect of life: work, family, relationships, educating children, religion, how to solve problems and overcome crises, healing, creativity, and much more. The core of Ananda's life-style and teaching is attunement to Reality higher than ourselves - which is the secret of happiness, peace, and well-being. The power of Jayadev's classes was how they reached into your very soul. He also delivered a lecture on *Yoga Sadhana*.



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Jonathan Panks is a singer songwriter as well as a teacher of Hatha Yoga. This gentle giant taught his classes with humour and compassion. Moving around the class he was evidently aware of each and every student and how they were progressing, supporting those who needed it, challenging those who could go further and advising on posture adjustments. Later in the week Jonathan was due to deliver a lecture on "The Spirit of Music and Life". Instead he decided to provide a demonstration with a concert combining well known ballads with a number of his own songs derived from his own life and observations of American culture and social change. Heather George accompanied him on a couple of songs providing a harmony drawing from her past experience in singing at folk clubs. We bought a copy of his CD, *50,000 Buffalo*. This is a great album of his music with numbers he has written over the last 12 years. On it Jonathan is backed by some very talented musicians including a slide guitarist and soprano sax player. Copies can be obtained through his website www.jonathanpanks.com. For yoga related matters he can be contracted



at www.yogabyjonathan.net. With Jonathan was his lovely wife Erin, an accomplished architect herself, she quite rightly (in my humble opinion) rates Michael Graves up there with Frank Lloyd Wright.

Husband and wife **Guru Dileep Kumar** and **Dr Nandita Devi** probably got the record for fitting the most asanas into their wonderful flowing classes. They are President and Director of the International Gurukulam, Yogabhavan of India and the USA, www.yogabhavan.com. Dileep is a member of the World Council of the International Yoga Federation. Nandita is President of US Yoga Federation and a Director of the North American Yoga Federation. Their classes are based on Gurukula Yoga, a traditional form of yoga handed down through the master. This powerful and therapeutic form frees up prana by dissolving energetic blocks. This charismatic pair treated us to profound lectures and workshops based on their extensive personal study, knowledge and wisdom. Nandita delivered lectures on *Yoga as Therapy*, and *Spiritual Leadership in Business*. Dileep provided lectures on *Chakras and Marmas*, *Yogasananas for Daily Life* and *Yoga for World Peace*. The latter reflecting the important work he does with the United Nations. **Nivedita**, their daughter, displayed a social confidence far beyond her 18 months. She became the darling of the festival with no shortage of volunteers to cuddle her.



Heather George is a Yoga, Pilates and ChiBall teacher and life coach from London UK, www.omtropy.com, who was representing the Independent Yoga Network. She provided her dynamic



flow yoga classes set to music from a broad base of Indian, African and Celtic origins together with some more modern ballads. Heather has an intuitive approach and awareness of both the physical and spiritual wellbeing of her students. This enabled her to keep students going at their own pace in classes that often had widely varying abilities or needs. One of her classes was for a group of Indian children who were present at the Hyatt for a yoga competition. They easily mastered the more advanced dance-flow sequences (based on the Ashtanga Yoga Chikitsa) that were accompanied by up-beat rhythms. Heather also included more gentle Hatha classes and

introduced participants to some core-strengthening Pilates postures. During her workshop on 'Flow Yoga' she included some Tai Chi for graceful flowing moves with breath control and Yoga Nidra for awareness and internal peace. In the UK Heather uses her knowledge of these disciplines alongside nutrition and stress management to provide an holistic service for her clients.

Yoga Mata Guru Wafaa is an artist as well as a yoga teacher. Amongst her many associations, she is Secretary of the International Yoga Federation for Egypt & all North Africa, Member of the International Yoga Federation and Member of World Yoga Council. She is a pioneer of yoga in Egypt, North Africa and the Middle East and a master of the Arts and pharonic mystical knowledge of Egyptology. She provides a range of classes and retreats for students young and old, beginners to advanced, with specialized programmes for women, children and prenatal classes. Wafaa's classes combined creative energetic and a compassionate style also using dance moves with an ability to touch your soul with her open and honest heart. She



also ran workshops on *Illumination of the Heart and Mind* and *Unique Approach to Body Movement*. Wafaa can be contacted at www.egyptiyoga.com.



Dr Yogita Mehta is originally from Gujarat in India and is now practicing in Cairo at the Indian Council for Cultural Relations. She was Indian gold medallist in Yoga. Yogita delivered Hatha yoga classes together with a lecture on *Yoga and Ayurveda*.

Anthony Sadasiva was executive consultant to the festival and together with Hossam Darwish planned and managed the whole event. In doing this he drew on his 25 years of experience, latterly as Director of Yoga Synthesis



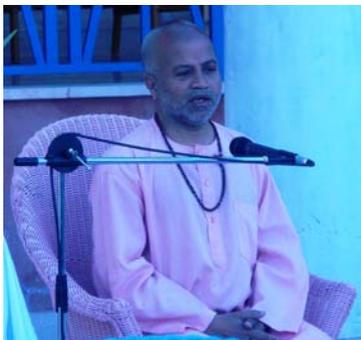
(www.yogasyntesis.org). Anthony also delivered one elegantly crafted lecture himself on the subject of *Ahimsa: The Enlightened Pathway to Peace*. Ahimsa is non-violence in action, thought or deed. Sadasiva explained that absolute Ahimsa is impossible and the key is motive. He left us with the message to practice Ahimsa as peace will naturally follow. In the picture Sadasiva is wearing the white scarf presented to him by Lama Tensing in gratitude for what he had

achieved for the festival.

Stephen Quong has studied Vedic Astrology with many of the most accomplished contemporary masters since 1970. It is called Jyotisha (the Science of Light) in Sanskrit and originated in India over 6,000 years ago. It is based on the Vedas, the most ancient spiritual texts of India, and is also directly related to Ayurveda and the study and practice of Yoga. Jyotisha is based on the Sidereal Zodiac, and uses the astronomical position of the star Chitra as the reference point for the calculation of the 12 zodiac signs. In contrast, most Western astrologers use the Tropical Zodiac, which is based upon the Sun's location at the Spring Equinox. Stephen presented lectures on *Astrology, Yoga and Spirituality*; *Astrology, Yoga and Free Will and Karmic Cycles of Life*. For more information visit Stephen's website www.jyotisha.com.



Swami Ramaswarupananda lead the chanting whilst we were in the Great Pyramid. The 50m climb to the King's chamber would have been nothing for someone whose ashram (Divine Life Society Sivananda Ashram) is over 1300m up in the Himalayas near Uttarhashi. Swami presented lectures on *How to Cultivate Virtues, Thought Power and an Introduction to the 8 Limbs of Raja Yoga*. Reports and photographs from his many tours and pilgrimages as well as articles and other material that may help in our quests for self-realisation may be found on his website www.sivachidananda.org.

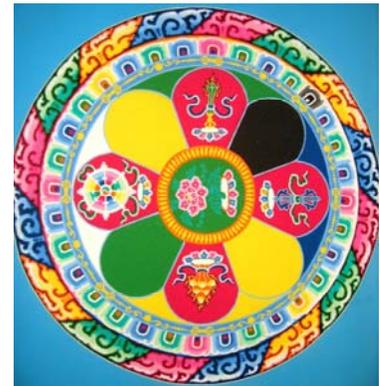


The tea ceremony originated in China some thousands of years ago. The first historical record from Korea documenting the offering of tea to an ancestral god describes a rite in the year 661 in which a tea offering was made to the spirit of [King Suro](#), the founder of the [Geumgwan Gaya](#) Kingdom (42-562). **Mahgo Suh** is originally from the Korean mountains and practices the Dado tea ceremony that has been handed down through her family for generations. Mahgo first gave a workshop to provide an *Introduction to Dado*. She later treated us to the full ceremony. She generously providing the opportunity to sample her organic freeze dried foods with their health benefits, www.mahgo.com.



One of the busiest people at the festival was **Lama Tensing Yignyen**. Originally from Namgyal Monastery, the personal monastery of the Dali Lama of Tibet, he is now based in New York. Lama Tensing delivered lectures on *The Basic Thoughts and Practices of Meditation, The Four Noble Truths and Developing Love, Compassion and Kindness*. The rest of the time he spent creating *The Mandala of Buddha of Compassion*. This intricate design is about 1m across and made from different coloured rice flour. Tensing started by chanting, then he laid out the blueprint of the Mandala, before starting the construction from the centre outward. He applied the coloured rice flour from a long metal funnel, called a Chakpu. Over dinner one evening he told us that he had built about 20 of these small mandalas by himself and been involved in building about 60 others, some involving up to 16 monks and taking a number of months. At a ceremony on the Thursday morning, Lama Tensing explained the meaning of the Mandala in terms of the symbols included. There are five main symbols that represent the five main wisdoms that bring happiness and peace in our minds:

- Red Lotus flower in the centre – Compassion;
- Blue Vajra (diamond sceptre) in the east – Patience;
- Yellow Wish fulfilling jewel in the south – Humility;
- White Wheel in the west – Intelligence;
- Green Sword in the North – Appreciation.



There are other symbols to represent:

- The five delusions that bring all misery and suffering to the world: Attachment, Hared, Pride, Ignorance and Jealousy;
- The five aggregates that compose our idea of self: Form, Feeling, Discernment, Compositional Factor and Consciousness.
- The five elements that made our body and the world where we live: Fire, Air, Earth, Water and Space;
- The five Buddhas or five enlightened states: Buddha, Amitabha, Akshobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amogasiddhi and Vairochana.



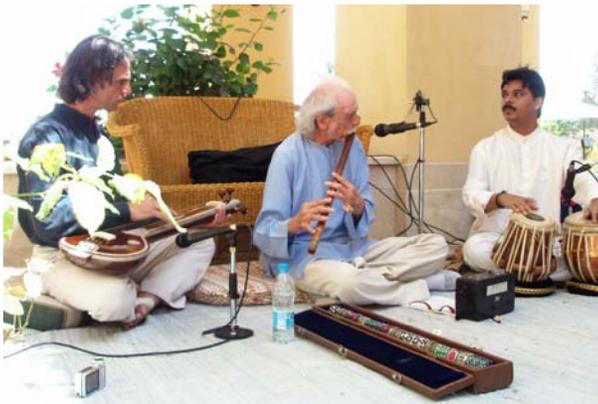
He went on to explain that he was not creating a work of art or something of material value, but engaging in a process that benefits him and also serve to benefit others. A key to this is the absence of attachment, emphasised as we all helped to dismantle the mandala, putting the flour into a jar before processing to the shores of the Gulf of Aqaba chanting Om Mani Padme Hum. Here Lama Tensing continued to chant as he poured the flour into the waters to send the compassion off to all. The fact that Israel, Jordan and Saudi Arabia are within sight, and just a few kilometres away, made this very poignant. After the ceremony Sadasiva informed us that this is the first time this ceremony has been performed in an Islamic country.

Everyone was very aware of the significance of this and was touched by it.

The state of health, according to Yoga Psychology, is the balanced flow of energy (Prana) through all the energy circuits of the mind and body. When this flow gets interrupted, by interfering with or breaking some laws of Nature, the body begins to revolt. This revolt is seen and experienced in the form of different symptoms, discomfort and disease. Ancient people knew how to re-establish the lost harmony and rhythm of the body and mind by utilizing the power of 'sound'.

The system is called Nada Yoga (The Yoga of Sound). It is a path of exploration of consciousness through sounds. The aim of the advanced state of Nada Yoga is to purify and harmonize the gross and subtle fields of body energy and bring them in alignment with their natural vibration

A leading exponent of Nada Yoga is **GS Sachdev** who plays the Bansuri flute, one of the oldest



instruments in existence. The Bansuri is a bass flute made of bamboo with 7 open finger holes. It has no keys, so the half and quarter notes are produced by precisely opening a portion of a hole with the finger. Sachdev ran two workshops on the *Foundations of Nada Yoga* where he explained the bases of Indian classical music – the raga, the melodic form and the tala, the time measure. The complexities lie in the subtle variations on the theme, ornamentation of notes, modal colouring and in the interplay between flute and tabla. At the second workshop he was joined by **Tapan Bhattacharya**, he is leading tabla player originally

from India but now based in Barcelona, Spain (www.tapangroup.com). Tapan explained the structured rhythms played on the tabla and how they fit with the flute. When it came to providing examples of the music they were joined by Anthony Sadasiva on Tanpura, a four stringed, fretless drone instrument. Finally on Friday evening we were treated to a Classical Indian Music Concert which was beautiful. Having had the theory explained, we were able to fully appreciate the complex music and the musicianship. We could see why they say that Sachdev's music is considered "*an antidote to stress, fatigue and cynicism*". We bought two of his CDs obtainable at www.bansuri.net.

After a week filled with varied practice, inspirational lectures and workshops accompanied by lovely people in a beautiful setting, what would be the best way to pull it all together and complete the experience ? I could think of nothing better than to go up to the top of the mountain for morning meditation and watch the sun rise over the Jordanian mountains. Lila had the same idea so our chanting was accompanied by her Shurti Box. Finally as the sun rose and the breeze lifted, Lila sent the sounds of her gong across the gulf. The photo on the right is just to show that I was there.





So a deep thank you to Hossam, Radwa and the team from T.E.N. Tours, Sadasiva , Nikki from Orascom together with the staff of the Hyatt Regency for organising and hosting such a special event. How could it be better next year ? Plans have started for the 3rd Festival on 7th to 15th April 2008 (see www.egyptiyogafestival.net) with the exiting concept of starting the festival amongst the pyramids in Giza for 2 days and then travelling across Sinai to Taba to continue it. It would be great if even more people could share the experience.



Love, light, truth and peace

Tony Davis

All photographs except the one of Dr Yogita Mehta are the property of Tony Davis and cannot be reused without his express permission.