

## [Bali's Bambu Yoga](#)

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One day in Bali a man was sitting on a beach in front of an old temple watching waves curl up out of an emerald sea and splash on the coral-white sand. Coconut fronds swished overhead in a friendly breeze. Then a strange thing happened. Two white butterflies started flying around his head, almost dancing. They were common butterflies, and at first the man didn't think much about them. But they kept fluttering around him and wouldn't leave. So he got up and waved them away. They beckoned and he followed them prancing down the beach. Suddenly, a cool volcanic force flowed into his body from nowhere. He felt the presence of the Gods, and he ran home, bolted all the doors, and sat-a little bit afraid, but also wondrous. A strong wind swirled around his house and a large luminous being entered. His "light body" was so big it filled the whole room. The spirit being asked the man to sit down on the floor where they both meditated for a while. Then the bright spirit told him about an old yoga practice that was needed in Bali at this time to help re-

energize the island. It involved moving the body vigorously through prescribed positions along with pranayama breathing exercises to help activate the kundalini life force. Fairytale? Not if you believe the tale told by a kindly schoolteacher, Dr. Nym Serengem and a real "deva," a legendary Javanese yogi who now resides on the inner planes. This all happened in 1989. Today, four years later, this vigorous kundalini/energy body meditation, called Bambu Kuning, "yellow bamboo," is spreading from village to village, all over Bali. The government even licensed it on an auspicious full-moon day, August 17th.

## Musclular Breathing and Inner Light

In July, Made Artha, a young married Balinese man who practices bambu kuning, visited Hawaii, hosted by Terri Schield, who had herself just been to Bali. They visited Hinduism Today's offices on Kauai. Made was attired in a traditional religious

headscarf, batik-

print shirt and a sarong/skirt that men wear on special occasions. His English is good, but he is shy, so Ms. Schield introduced the practice for him: "Bambu kuning is essentially a series of exercises to bring white light into the body, first opening all the chakras and bringing in the light. Over a period of time, they learn to increase it. It began with just a few men and now there are over 2,000." Made interrupted: "More. It's growing all over." Ms. Schield continued, "I personally witnessed one practice session on a big, flat beach where 700 men were doing it. It was near sunset. They started with a beautiful Hindu puja and then did the exercises for about two hours into the darkness. Afterwards, there was demonstration (not done for the few of us watching who were either ignored or unnoticed). Some beginners were told to run into a line of more advanced practitioners who had set up a psychic force barrier of light in front of them. The novitiates ran and definitely hit it. It was very dramatic."

Made Artha is by occupation a "driver." In Bali that means a taxidriver, a guide, friend, a confidante and always someone you end up missing when you leave. He first trained as a painter and sculptor. He and his wife have one young son. He has been practicing bambu kuning for two years. He explained that it is presently only for men, mostly married, and not for women, yet. He said wives don't feel at all left out. They are very happy. He laughed and said that it's the men in Bali who need this, not the women. They're already religious. Everyone in Bali knows it's the women who do all the daily pujas, home rites, prayers and fasts and have been the ones keeping the religious life vibrant century after century. It's the men who have gotten worldly. By doing bambu kuning, they are getting more religious. Their wives love it. In fact, it seems nobody has anything but praise for the bambu kuning wave. "It's good for Bali" is village elders' final word. "It has also encouraged more meditation in the temples," Maade shares. It is spreading naturally-no neon- signs, big hype, rallies, door- to-door crusades. One man casually tells another at a taxi cue, in a paddy field or over some tea in the kerosene-lit village evenings. The shy visionary teacher Dr. Nym shies from publicity or recognition.

## Five Levels of Attainment

The actual technique is highly ritualized. At all stages, it begins with purification, bathing, a Hindu puja, Vedic mantra invocations, prayer chants to various spirits and Gods (Surya/Aditya, Agni, Siva, Brahma and Vishnu) and invocations of

protection with incense, water and flowers and hand mudras. Members are taught all about the seven chakras, spiritual force centers within the subtle inner bodies, and how to flow energy up through them. In the second level, the practitioner sprinkles water on the sahasrara crown chakra, and on the third-eye ajna chakra, the center of spiritual vision. As one gains more power, he is taught how to use the "light" to bless, cure, heal, drive malevolent spirits out of homes and even surround machinery with a protective force field. At each level of attainment, the men cut a staff of yellow bamboo from a grove. It gets carved and blessed and becomes a sacred totem of the spiritual energies they have built up. As in learning any skill, the initiates are encouraged to practice as often as possible. Most practice alone once a day before or after work and then on weekends in groups from a few to a few hundred.

A brochure handed out freely to anyone interested in learning bambu kuning reads in part: "The spirit from long ago, the one known for his powers while living, has come back to teach. It is the spirit of Gajah Mada who, while living in Java, had the power to disappear and had total use of light power. The oldest living teacher of bambu kuning is Ida Bharata Hyang Agni Jaya." It continues: "This spiritual method must be done with a clear mind, no distractions. When you reach a certain level-after you are 80% competent-you can contact directly with the spirit of Gajah Mada. This is the main difference about this 'club'-when you empower yourself, you no longer need the physically embodied instructor.

"The main aim of bambu kuning is: a) to teach those who believe in God how to approach God; b) to teach that there is a world more subtle than this physical world and a Power greater than human power; and c) to increase the spirituality of the member so he can control his emotions and increase his will. It is not for the ego, i.e. to 'show off.' "

"Breath and physical movement must work as one. With easy movement from body and breath, slowly, together they create force. Usually in two days you can already feel the power. The energy in space is in our bodies too. The force of the storm, flood, fire and earthquake can be found in our body too. These explosive energies can be used as good power. Before beginning the exercise you must first meditate and pray. Then breathe and move and keep the breath in navel. Then blow it to that part of the body you want to move." It explains that a kind of subtle light surrounds the body of the practitioner after each exercise period. Before advancing to a higher level, fasting and refraining from sex, movies and external stimulation are required. At level two, a special type of breathing is learned that comes inwardly from the Gajah Mada spirit. Before advancing to level five, you need

to have a vision from God. Then only can the teacher give instructions. Bali's Hindu History-Art is Religion

In the 5th century, a few hundred Hindu princes fled Java to Bali with their courts of priests, musicians, dancers and artists to escape Muslim territorialization. Bali's indigenous peoples embraced Hinduism-and later Buddhism-as spiritual paths akin to their own. What evolved is now decidedly the most uniquely aesthetic form of Hinduism in the world, mirroring the more East Asian philosophy that every act-yogic or seemingly mundane-should radiate beauty and gracefulness as an expression of spirituality.

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