

Saraswati River Yoga Newsletter

Editor: Judith Lockard

Vol. 1, No. 10

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Theme of the Month

The Devi Gita

Once a long, long time ago in a land of frosty mountain peaks and dense forests, there dwelled a young king, named Janamejaya. Although he ruled over a land of great beauty and wealth, he was very sad. His reign had come early in life as his father, the king, had died suddenly and the son mourned his loss. Even more troubling to the young ruler was the fact that his father had descended to the realms of Hell and was suffering great torment. The learned sages of the court tried to console Janamejaya. They read to him from the Mahabharata and applied other methods of that time to treat despondency and grief. But nothing could console him.

Thus begins the story in which the teachings of the Devi Bhagavata are embedded. The last ten verses of this work are the Devi Gita. It is a song, or

hymn, to the Goddess Bhuvanesvari, the all powerful, all knowing/seeing energy that creates and that IS the universe. She is awesome and terrible in her power. This is not the power of domination but of freedom, clarity and the ability to expand infinitely beyond doubt and fear, time and space and to take her devotees with her.

The Devi Bhagavata follows a particular traditional Hindu form for spiritual texts in which a hero seeks the advice and counsel of a sage who then gives his teaching in a story, like a fairy tale. In the Devi Bhagavata the sage, Vyasa, tells Janamejaya that in order to recover from his grief and despair he must go to the mountains and worship at the feet of the Great Mother Goddess. He then tells Janamejaya of a time when the gods sought the intervention of the Goddess because their land was being overtaken by a great demon, Taraka.

This then is the story that frames the Devi Gita. The gods, lead by Himalaya, the mountain king, worship at the Goddess' shrine. She appears to them in such a magnificent form that he and the other gods faint at the sight. She is brilliant beyond imagination and is seen to be floating on a Jewelled Island, which is forested with fantastic plants and well-wishing gems. Traditional Hindus, familiar with the Bhagava Gita and especially the Upanishads, upon hearing this description, understood that the Goddess or the depiction of Space as the Goddess, Bhuvanesvari, was being elevated above all other manifestations

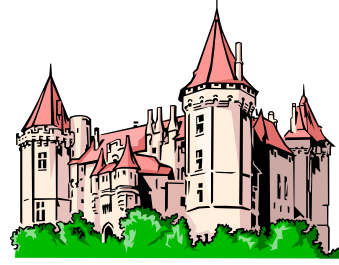
of the divine, which are then included in her symbolic image.

As well as being a song extolling the Goddess' power and beneficence, The Devi Gita is a treasure trove of yoga stories, teachings and practices. In the original version, written in the twelfth century of the Common Era, the Goddess is pictured as a beautiful queen seated on a throne, which is held up by the lifeless forms of the most powerful pantheon of the aesthetic tradition, Vishnu, Shiva, and their other manifestations. The message is that life is breathed into the spiritual practices through devotion to Bhuvaneshvari or the whole of creation and universal consciousness. In her song she also expounds on the need for all of the yogic practices. However, she situates them as preliminaries to the final devotional practice of letting go of all concepts and reveling in the joy of life.



The Gita then continues with the message of the Goddess to her devotees. As the all powerful Goddess she both chides and consoles them, saying “How can you doubt that I will protect you and joyfully fulfill your every wish?” Then, like a mother appearing at the bedside of her child in the throws of a terrible nightmare, she gathers them into her arms and sings them a lullaby. “Do not be afraid. I will not let anything truly bad happen to you. You are surrounded by my love and you are my love. You can BE truth, beingness and blissful

freedom (sat cit ananda) if you will devote yourself to me.”



Further differentiating itself from the traditional texts, a description of her magnificent palace sends another radically divergent message. Her palace is comprised of four great halls that she presides over. In one are the joys and pleasures of this body, in another spiritual liberation, in the third she discourses on Truth, and in the fourth she consults with the ministers of her realm as to the business of ruling the universe. While the aesthetic tradition teaches renunciation of all the manifestations of this world, Bhuvaneshvari stands for the declaration that it is through the enjoyment of life and the understanding and compassion that comes from sorrow, that liberation springs. This is not, of course emotionality or reactivity, but the mature immersion in all that is natural to the human predicament.

In this way the story of the king mourning the loss of his father, the father suffering the torments of hell, and the gods terrorized by the demon Taraka are the perfect set up for her teaching; through total absorption in ALL of life and through love of the life she has given us, it is possible to uncover the awareness of BEING HER. She is space, we are space, there is nothing but space. Creativity in life is space wishing to reveal its true being. Space is truth. When you live the truth you are space and all separateness disappears.

Pose of the Month

Tadasana



Mountain pose. Reconnecting to the space outside, around and below we become steadfast and gain the encompassing view from the top.

Tadasana is the template of all standing poses and the basic pose to re-educate the body in its relationship to space. This is because space is expressed through the form of the body. The basic design of relaxation, dynamics of opposition, receptivity and strength find their foundation and expression in the structure of tadasana.

We are unique as humans as we are the only ones who can stand perfectly upright. This harmonizing of the up and down axis gives us a relationship to space that expresses insight into the dynamics of movement and stillness. As when we are on the summit of a mountain and see all things clearly and all at once.

Tadasana re-educates the power of body, mind and speech through space. To feel this, stand upright with the head neck and trunk in a straight line. Energetically move the front of the body to the back body. Let your lower ribs drop their weight to the hipbones. Press the energy down through the hip sockets to the

knees, then to the feet through to the earth. Now rebound the energy back up the front body and lift it through the crown of the head to the sky. Feel the energy move from the spine to the left and right sides of the body, from the center to the periphery. Relax the face, smoothing the muscles around the mouth and eyes. Relax the tongue into the lower jaw. Relax where the head meets the neck and notice how the lower side ribs spread.

Now open the body to the outside space and feel the rhythm of inner and outer space as fluidly as breathing in and out.

As with all asanas described in this newsletter, please practice under the supervision of an SRYS instructor.

DUE TO POPULAR DEMAND

Kirin is now teaching more classes!!!



Her new schedule is:

Monday	11am	level 3-4
Tuesday	9:15 am	level 2-3
Tuesday	6:30 pm	level 2-3
Wednesday	6:00 pm	level 2-3
Thursday	9:15 am	level 2-3
Thursday	11 am	level 1
Friday	9:15 am	level 3-4
Saturday	8:30 am	level 1-2

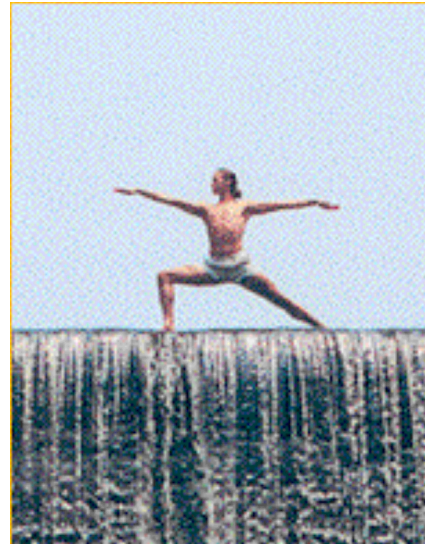
Who We Are...

Get to know the SRY teachers and staff members a little better with this new column, designed to introduce you to the people who help keep the heart of our yoga center beating!

David's Story

"Ballet is full of mysteries. Take the question of the dancers' health. Before company class starts every day at ten o'clock they straggle in, drawn and ashen-faced. How it alarms me. I put it down to their diet of black coffee, chocolate bars and cigarettes. Poor girls, how could they have managed the stairs let alone survive an hour or two of class. They line the studio with bags and bundles that disgorge a cargo of bandages and woolies, plasters and cotton wool. It is less a dance studio and more a casualty ward as they pad and plaster bruised feet, tie scarves like tourniquets around their heads and waists, heave themselves into plastic trousers - gingerly lest they awaken past injuries. As they hobble about I wonder how these invalids will ever bear the rigors of the barre. Then, against all reason, a daily miracle takes place. As the first notes of the piano are struck, far from wilting they begin to shimmer with well-being. Their eyes open wider, their hair starts to shine, their skin glows and, as the time for center work arrives the general radiance is dazzling. The miracle is that they are drawing strength from the very act of dancing itself, living off it, and nourished by it. As a long day of rehearsal passes the energy drawn from the dance seems to grow until the accumulated vitality is offered to their evening audience as an incomparable gift."

~Unknown author



Yoga and my body

This was my life for the better part of 15 years. Well, minus the coffee and cigarettes and adding a few knee and back braces. I began dancing at the age of 6 and went away from home at 11 to attend performing arts school. At 17, I was dancing with professional companies and at 19 I became a full time company dancer. By the age of 30 I had had three ankle surgeries, one knee surgery, a bad back and would brag that I had injured every joint in my body except my elbows. And after a car accident last October, I'm down to one elbow. If I added up all the times I was on crutches for various sprains and brakes I'd bet it would be a year of my life.

Yoga, my saving grace, came to me when I was 26. I learned the sun salutes out of a book and incorporated them into my daily pre-class warm ups. They not only helped me to warm up but I began to breath more with my body movement and found myself doing Ujia breath without realizing it. In fact the other dancers made fun of the way I would breath loudly and sigh a lot during warm

ups. But I was tapping into something that felt really good, so I stuck with it. I believe that this helped prolong my dancing career. Although, in hind sight, practicing head stand incorrectly on my already abused neck vertebra may not have been such a great idea. But I was fearless as far as my body was concerned. This was in part do to the fact that I was a shy kid whose only way of expression was dance. Its value to me was beyond compare. I knew however that if I kept on abusing my body at that level, when I grew old I'd wind up in a wheel chair.

By my late twenties, my shyness finally gone, I was mainly dancing to satisfy my ego. But when the aches and pains moved from ankles and knees to neck and back and my stomach became ulcerated from pain killers and anti inflammatory drugs, it was time to make a change. Today, one by one, my old injuries are working their way out of my body as I practice asana more often and am more mindful.

Yoga and my heart

I found my teacher, Kirin, almost 5 years ago. From the first class when I heard her explain the difference between pity and compassion, I knew I was home. I remember her saying, "Our hearts are designed to break. That's their function; to break so wide that we glimpse our infinite capacity for compassion." I've been hooked ever since. I suppose one can never get enough of what never ends, and for me yoga is that unending dance. Like Shiva's dance of creation & destruction, as we recognize our selves in this divine cosmic drama we can see how we are in relationship with all of life and that every particle of matter and every event and every moment is an expression of nature's wonder and

beauty. Her longing for expression, even its horrible beauty, has a purpose. For how could we enjoy this dance if not for the sufferings of the dancer?

My own sufferings grow less and less as my meditations deepen and the mundane of everyday day life gives way to an old, and new again, child-like wonder for this drama of ours. Pain and sadness have not left me but they are now like old friends whose habits once annoyed me but now are endearments of familiarity or a reminder of what is truly important in life: THIS VERY MOMENT

Yoga and my mind

And thanks to my heart being smarter than my head I don't have to worry about the past or future. They only exist in my head. I used to worry about where my life was going, about how much time I was wasting because my life was not exactly where I wanted it to be. Then my wants would change and I'd wonder why I had gotten so worked up. In meditation I became aware that I was on a path of self-discovery and linear time did not exist out side of my fears and doubts. The heart knows the NOW. And our inner longing is always more poignant then the cravings of liner thinking.

Yoga and my meditations

My favorite discovery about meditation is that as it grows on the cushion, I grow while OFF it. The amount of time I spend in practices; Asana, chanting and meditation, is directly proportional to the time that I have clarity and joy in my work, play, teaching and life.

Yoga is my dance

I recently did a four day silent retreat in my apartment. Just me and the cats and a lot of time to meditate. I set out to do all

my activities, showering, eating and practicing with an unhurried calm. What I discovered was that with no phone, TV, book, or person to busy my mind there is a rhythm in the very air, a life pulse that when I listened to it was so captivating that I became the dance. As ego dissolves beauty abounds. Thanks Ma for the best dance lesson of my life.

I would never have guessed that I would have become a yoga teacher. Even after growing out of teen-age shyness, I would go blank if I had to speak to a group. I was a terribly lazy student with learning disabilities and I was addicted to my cravings. Commitment to truth is all it took. I made a realistic commitment to do self-inquiry practices. Once I did that the universe gave me the strength, time, money, discipline and patience I needed, though on her schedule not mine. But as my faith became verified, as I saw my class schedule grow and my bills paid I allowed my teaching to become an offering, not just my Job.

With this enlightened state of mind (Faith) working for me, I was able to let go of two of my oldest friends, Fear and Doubt; fear of failing & doubting my self. Letting them go freed so much of my mental and physical energy that I could channel my energy into really living life rather than just dreaming my way through it. I replaced fear and doubt with two new friends, Passion & Inspiration. Life is pretty bleak with out them. As my mind got clearer I got another couple of friends, Responsibility and Accountability or in more yogic terms Satya (truth) and Ahimsa (nonviolence).

I've been given this gift of life, this stage on which to dance.

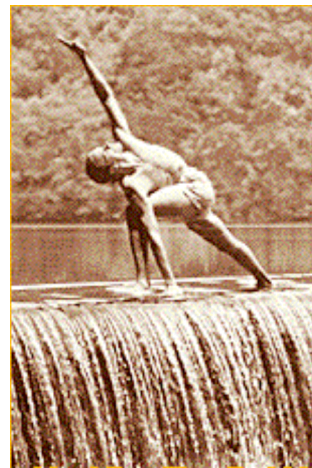
MY RESPONSABILITY is to dance, to be real and authentic, to serve truth.

MY ACCOUNTABILATY is to every particle of creation. I'm held accountable to all of existence as I'm receiving this gift and giving this performance.

DO NO HARM. I must try not to step on anyone else's toes while I'm here, dancing my dance.

Teaching yoga is my biggest honor, my latest dance, my giving my gift. Thank you to all who sweat, breath, move and dance with me in class every day. You are all my teachers.

OM SHANTI SHANTI SHANTI



~ David Pittenger is a graduate of Kirin Mishra's Saraswati River Yoga Teacher Training Program, a registered Yoga teacher and full time instructor, experienced in teaching students of all levels from therapeutic pre-beginner through advanced. He lives in Lumberville, PA, with his two new kittens, Vishnu & Shiva, and the 'old man' Slick.

Yogis in the World

This space is one in which you will get to know the people who practice with you at SRYS and how their yoga practice is manifesting in their lives.

By Naomi Drew

Yoga as a Vehicle for Peace Activism

When Judith asked me to write an article on how my practice of yoga links to the peace work I do, my first thought was, how could I possibly narrow yoga's influence just to peace activism? Yoga so suffuses everything I do. It's the light that illuminates, the ground that supports, and the far-reaching stars that draw my gaze toward something larger. But since Judith asked, as Robert Browning once said, "Let me count the ways."

Aside from all the above, yoga is the thread that runs through every part of my activism work, which includes speaking, writing, organizing, and interacting with the media. Actually, yoga is the needle as well as the thread.



It jabs me each time my nagging, nattering mind is seduced by needs, wants, preferences, aversions, and personal issues. Any of these could easily shrink the boundaries of my life into a narrow, confined space. Thankfully, the needle of yoga, pierces through, reminding me that my life and my practice are not just for me. If I can't make a difference in this world, then what is my time here on earth really

worth? And as the Talmud says, "If Not Me, Who? If Not Now, When?"



The work of peace work has always been a huge part of my adult life, even though my yoga practice was intermittent for many years. It seemed like there was never enough time for yoga -- I was always so busy with everything else: teaching, writing, leading workshops, raising a family, and for many years helping care for a chronically ill parent. But after awhile, the combined weight of all my obligations began to completely deplete me. I had used everything up in the service of others, and there was nothing left for me.

Then everything changed. In 1998, a diagnosis of breast cancer sent me into the arms of yoga like an ardent lover running toward her beloved. Quickly, my practice became the salt of my life, helping me see clearly, for the first time, the true meaning of Gandhi's words: "We must be the change we wish to see in the world." In order to to both heal and teach peace, I needed to live peace -- in my body, mind, emotions, and actions. Being committed to the concept of peace wasn't enough. Living it required that I become a far more peaceful person than ever before. The thread of yoga, weaving itself in and out of every part of me, made this come to pass.

Over the past five years -- which, thankfully, have been healthy ones -- yoga has enabled me to fully live what I believe. At the start of each asana practice, I set the intention that whatever peace of mind, physical health, spiritual grounding, and joy I gain will help me contribute to others, and that the world become a little more peaceful as a result.

There have been countless ways yoga has made an impact on my work. Before writing my last book, for example, I had a satsang with Kirin. She gave me the gift of some wonderful breathing exercises and meditations. I went home and created a meditation altar in my office only steps away from my computer.

Each morning before writing, I would sit before the altar and ask to be given the words that could somehow contribute to more peace in our world -- a tall order, but yoga teaches us to live by our intentions. And, as Kirin says, why not make them big. Breathing and meditating before the altar each day during the writing of that book was incredibly powerful. Frequently the spark of an idea would ignite during meditation. I'd literally jump off the cushion and dash to the computer where the words would flow out in a steady stream. On many days the phone would ring while I was writing, and there, on the other end, would be someone giving me the name of the perfect person to interview or the perfect source of information. The breathing and meditation felt like they were catalytic each time.

Yoga has also helped me remain calm in hugely challenging situations. Having to speak before large groups, I've developed a number of rituals: meditating, even briefly, before I leave

the house, chanting in the car, then slipping into a ladies room before I speak to breathe deep and focus my intention. Being grounded by the peaceful place inside enables me to approach the audience with a strong sense of equanimity, one that often surprises me. And each time, I feel so grateful for its source.

I was asked to appear on national television last year as an expert on peaceful parenting. Totally jarred by the prospect, I spent the twenty-four hours prior to the taping meditating, chanting, and envisioning a positive outcome. When I went on the show, I held in the palm of my hand a small white shell from my meditation altar. Each time fear reared its head, I would stroke the shell and breathe deep. No matter how difficult the questions (and some were whoppers) I kept dipping into that same calm space I feel when we stand in *tadasana* at the start of practice. People commented after the show how calm I seemed. Once again, yoga, this time yoking me to a place of peace that was larger than my fear.



Beyond all else, yoga has enabled me to see that taking on huge, seemingly unattainable goals doesn't have to be fraught with struggle -- it actually can be joyful, serene, and imbued with a sense of possibility. The silken thread of yoga weaving its way through every aspect of my life makes me know this. And in the moments I forget, the needle is always there for a little jab.

Naomi Drew lives in Lawrenceville New Jersey. She is the author of five books.

If you'd like to learn more about Naomi's work, go to LearningPeace.com.

CHAI CHAT



Hello again, Saraswati Gods and Goddesses! After all my meanderings, I am glad to be planted on terra firma. I understand that is Italian for firm ground. We will have to verify that with Margaret Ammirati, back from another month in Siena. How does she ever finagle her lifestyle? Hmm I wonder if they serve Chai there-Cappichiao maybe?

Charlene Schwartz also recently returned from Europe. I wonder if she bought something gorgeous in Milan? I overheard her say she also traveled to Budapest, but the highlight of her journey was in Poland where she walked the very ground her grandmother stood upon in the 1800's.

Paulette Shepherd may not have traveled to South Africa this summer but her brother-in-law did. He was thoughtful enough to bring her back a gorgeous pillow. For those as curious as I, you can check out that colorful pillow at her yoga spot, ask and I'm sure she will detail its origins. Tell her I sent you.

Betsy Moore is back in class, returning from resting an injury. But the real reason she's been M.I.A. is that she has been revamping a new edition, excuse me...3 volumes! of her Criminal Law in Pennsylvania text. She's not one to brag but she is one powerful and influential retired attorney! As if she isn't busy enough, she is embarking on becoming a

hospice volunteer. I want you by my side Betsy-in the courts or on my deathbed.

Nicole Paxson has returned to us now that she is living in Doylestown. If you see her, give her a thanks for sourcing Deepak Kumar at our yoga center with all his wonderful music.

Abby Hoffman will be leaving us for a while. She will be commuting to NY for 8 months studying culinary arts in service to Elijah Promise Soup Kitchen in New Brunswick, NJ. Not many people at yoga know about her years of dedication and service to that program. Our last glimpse of her will be at the 2nd annual Craft Fair which she produces so gorgeously. Be sure to wish her well on her travels, and mark your calendars folks! Saturday, November 15th!

Have you checked out the wonderful Tibetan Store in New Hope run by Tibetan Buddhist, Menlha. Although his shop has only been open for 2 months, he has created a buzz with his first venture in commercial business. With a graduate degree in economics, he envisions teaching Tibetan (Eastern) economics within our higher education system years. All he needs is a lead ... anyone?



Congratulations Zaira Leal! We hear your baby girl, Niahm is wonderful.

Is it true that Barbara Cole-Kiernan was seen on the swings at Cavallo Park. Rumor has it her grandkids weren't even with her!

It's been fun chatting but I have to run now, my friend is coming over for some chai.

Conscious Cooking

By Jonathan Labman



I often struggle with cooking, having been raised during a time when it was expected that my mother (or some other overworked woman) would do all of the cooking, and wishing that I could still be spoiled like that! However, since I can't, I'm trying to remember cooking as an act of love and service to the Divine in the person of my partner (who's even busier than I am), myself, and others who may have a meal with us. One of my favorite recipes was given to me by my grandmother Sarah Labman.

This is called:

Luchon Kugel (say "luk-shun koo-gl") also called Noodle Pudding

(Serves 12)

Ingredients:

1 pound egg noodles
1/4 pound butter
3/4 pound sugar
8 or more tsp. cinnamon
3 eggs
3/4 pound whole curd, full fat cottage cheese
3/4 pound sour cream

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees.
Boil one pound of egg noodles with 1 tsp. salt until al dente.

While they're boiling:

- grease a 9 x 13" glass casserole dish with a pat of butter,
- slice the 1/4 pound of butter into pats (right on the paper it's wrapped in)
- mix 8 or more tsp. cinnamon into 3/4 pound of sugar (grandma used white, you can substitute),
- get out your cottage cheese and sour cream and eggs, whisk the eggs.

Drain the noodles.

Add the butter to the boiled and drained noodles (they don't have to be rinsed). You can use the same pot that you boiled them in to do all of this mixing.

Mix in the pats of butter until melted.
Add 3/4 of a pound of cottage cheese
Add 3/4 of a pound of sour cream
Add 3 beaten eggs.
Mix all of this thoroughly.

Now sprinkle 1/2 cup of the cinnamon-sugar mixture into the noodle-egg-cream mixture.

Pour the whole noodle mixture into the casserole dish.

Sprinkle the remaining 1/4 cup of cinnamon sugar evenly on top of the noodle mix.

Bake uncovered at 375 degrees for one hour.

Let cool and cut into 12 squares.

Our Birthday Gift to YOU!

Thank you for your loyalty to Saraswati River Yoga School & Center! Pick up a complimentary coupon at the front desk & bring some guests with you....

- ~When they purchase a 5-class card, you get a free class!
- ~When they purchase a 10-class card, you get 2 free classes!!
- ~When they purchase a Monthly Unlimited, you get a free month – our treat - both can come for the price of one!!!!

OM SHANTI

This coupon will be honored until 12/31/03.



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Saraswati River Yoga Center

Presents eleven artists and their work at its

Second Annual Fine

Craft Sale

Saturday, November 15, 2003, 12:30 - 5:30 PM

Entry is free and light refreshments will be available.

The featured artists are:

Jacqueline Armstead, a dollmaker; Bonnie Hauck, who crafts sea-glass mirrors and jewelry; Abby Hoffman and Katia McGuirk, tilemakers; Kate and Echo, t-shirts, jewelry and pocketbooks; Beatrice Landolt, clay; Laura McClanahan, digital art and video; Susan Mulhern, ceramics and beaded jewelry; Sherry Tinsman, silver, gold and semi-precious stones; Three Mangoes, Henna body painting; Nicole Young, mixed media.



Upcoming Events & Announcements

Check lobby for flyers and details!

Mantra & Meditation

with Kirin Mishra

Thursday nights in October

Wallflowers: Asanas on the Wall

with David Pittenger

Thursday nights in November

The Ethics of Caring

With Judith Lockard, Barbara Cole-Kiernan, Jonathan Labman
Nov 1 & 2

Sacred Rhythm

with Bobbi Ellis

Nov 9 1-3 pm

Ayurvedic Consultations

with Dr. Aparna Bapat

Nov 11 & 12 – by appt only!

Vedic Astrology Weekend Workshop

with Deborah English

Nov 22 & 23

108 Sun Salutes!

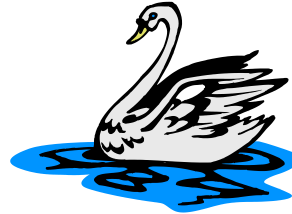
with Kirin Mishra

Dec 22

We're having a party!!!

Help us celebrate our third birthday!

November 22 starting at 6 pm



John Barbati Insurance Services

A conscientious guy tries to do right for clients.

Health Care- Blue Cross & Aetna plans for individuals and groups.

Life- Affordable term programs for family protection.

Long-term Care- Persons fifty and older should research this because it protects retirement assets from being wiped out. Premiums are very affordable when policies begin at younger age.

Disability- creates family income if illness/injury and unable to work

Always happy to chat with anyone who wishes to review options. Please call 215-794-7418 or email: jbandlg@comcast.net

Join us for our Second Annual Fine Arts Craft Fair!

November 15 from 12:30-5:30

SARASWATI RIVER YOGA

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