



Yasodhara Ashram  
YOGA RETREAT & STUDY CENTRE

# 2020

Annual Review  
A Year of Resilience





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In Memory of  
*Swami Radhananda*  
(1941-2021)

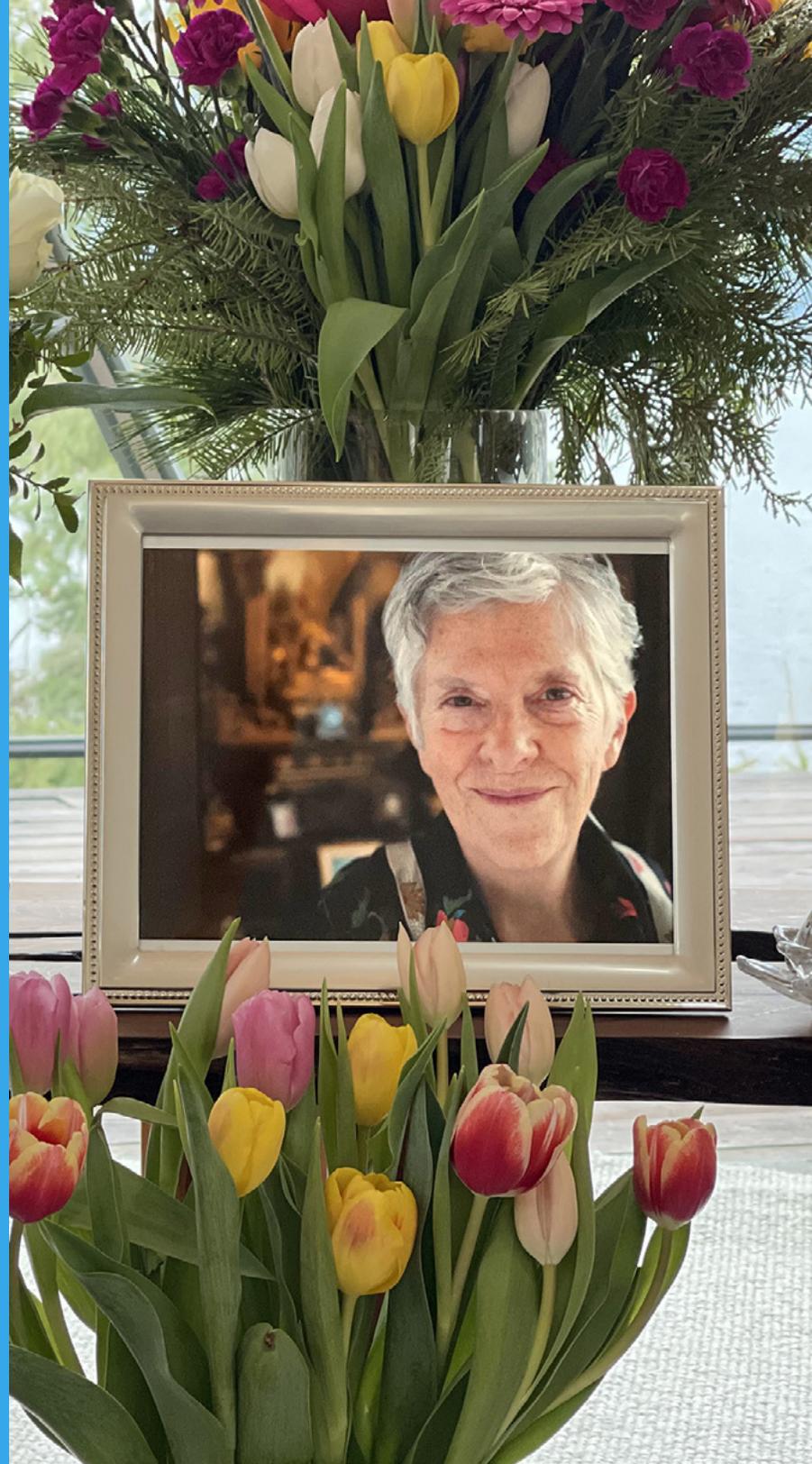
Swami Radhananda, president and spiritual director of Yasodhara Ashram from December 1993 to May 2014, passed away peacefully January 28, 2021 at Yasodhara Ashram. →



**In her 20+ years of leadership of the Ashram,** Swami Radhananda introduced an experiential style of teaching that empowers people to make their own discoveries. She fostered harmony and inclusivity, and encouraged young people on the spiritual path. She also set the Ashram on its environmental sustainability focus, ensuring that it will be a place of learning and transformation for generations to come. She was a spiritual leader who embraced humility and courage. She especially encouraged women to fulfill their potential.

Swami Radhananda was a devoted disciple of Swami Sivananda Radha, who embraced her as her successor before her death in 1995. Swami Radhananda first came to Yasodhara Ashram in 1977 as Mary-Ann McDougall—mother, wife and teacher—where she met Swami Radha and became a lifelong student of this spiritual lineage. She was the director of the centre in Lethbridge, Alberta from 1986 to 1990, when she moved to the Ashram. She had a rewarding career as an educator and consultant.

Swami Radhananda is the author of a memoir about her time with Swami Radha, *Carried by a Promise: A Life Transformed by Yoga*, and a book of inspirational essays, *Living the Practice, Collected Writings on the Transformative Potential of Yoga*. Both books express her practical approach to yoga.



# President's Message: THE PANDEMIC PIVOT



**2020 was a year like no other for the whole world**, including Yasodhara Ashram. Being a small and nimble organization, we were able to ride the waves of uncertainty —observing, listening and adapting as best we could.

AND we could not have done it without you. As our extended community, you made it clear how much the Ashram means to you through your generous donations, your support of our new online classes, as well as your prayers and kind thoughts. You carried us. Thank you! We are grateful, too, for the government wage subsidies that helped us maintain our precious core employees.

Once the pandemic hit, we cancelled on-site courses. A summer without guests was a big change —probably the first in our 57-year history. And it evoked a flavour of the Ashram's beginnings, with a small community of residents. This year it was an intergenerational group including students from the 2020 Yoga Development Course (YDC), essential staff and some new and returning karma yogis who went into two-week quarantines on arrival. We worked

together to keep the gardens tended, the fruit picked and preserved, the kitchen functioning, in-house classes, satsangs and beach celebrations alive. Knowing of the suffering in the world, we kept the Light flowing. We were happy to extend more locally also through donations of extra garden produce to the food bank. The sense of community was strong and we were grateful to have each other, especially knowing that so many people were isolated and alone.

The teachings stayed very much alive. New curriculum was created and as teachers, we learned together with you to interact via travel-free online platforms that provided a heartfelt and revolutionary way of bringing us close.

At the end of the summer we brought Swami Radhananda home from a long-term care facility in Nelson, where she was restricted to one essential visitor. Here she lived her last days surrounded by loving family and friends, supported by kind and professional caregivers. She passed into the Light at the Ashram in January 2021. Our time with her was enriching for us all. It was a privilege to give back to this dedicated woman who inspired the Ashram's evolution through her twenty-one years of strong, heartfelt leadership.

2020—what a challenging, innovative, learning and caring time. Looking back I recognize adaptability, grace and support; the pressure and creativity of disruption to generate new possibilities; the delight in observing the residents shining in their leadership; the joy in seeing young people take responsibility and catalyze new approaches. Also the stress of the ongoing pandemic. We learned that we could all work together, supporting our strengths, opening to our concerns and questions, learning from each other. It was like an experiment to see that within the limitations of our bubble, we could still choose to create the kind of world we want to live in.

And we planned—with very tentative sketches—what could come next. We saw a way that the YDC, which has been running since 1969, could keep going if participants entered a quarantine period supported by online components, outdoor walkabouts, single room accommodations and food delivery services. Looking further ahead into 2021, we imagined similar three-week retreats and a few courses that combine quarantine with Karma Yoga, online and in-person learning—all subject to the fluctuating conditions and restrictions of the times. And so in 2021, the experiment in adaptability continues...

*Swami Lalitananda*

SWAMI LALITANANDA



# About Us

**Yasodhara Ashram is a yoga retreat and study centre founded by Swami Sivananda Radha in 1963 in Kootenay Bay, British Columbia.** As a Canadian charity and active learning centre, our purpose is to stimulate open intellectual and spiritual enquiry, supporting the potential of transformation in each person. We help people to evolve and lead fulfilling lives—currently through courses and retreats online, as well as through living together in community, where we put into practice what we teach.



# Teaching & Community



**In 2020 most on-site programs,** including courses and retreats, were cancelled due to the pandemic. In mid-March, the Ashram went into a strict lock-down, with anyone entering going into a two-week quarantine for the safety of all. We stayed current with COVID-19 protocols including physical distancing, hand-washing and sanitizing, as well as upgraded ventilation for the cooler season.

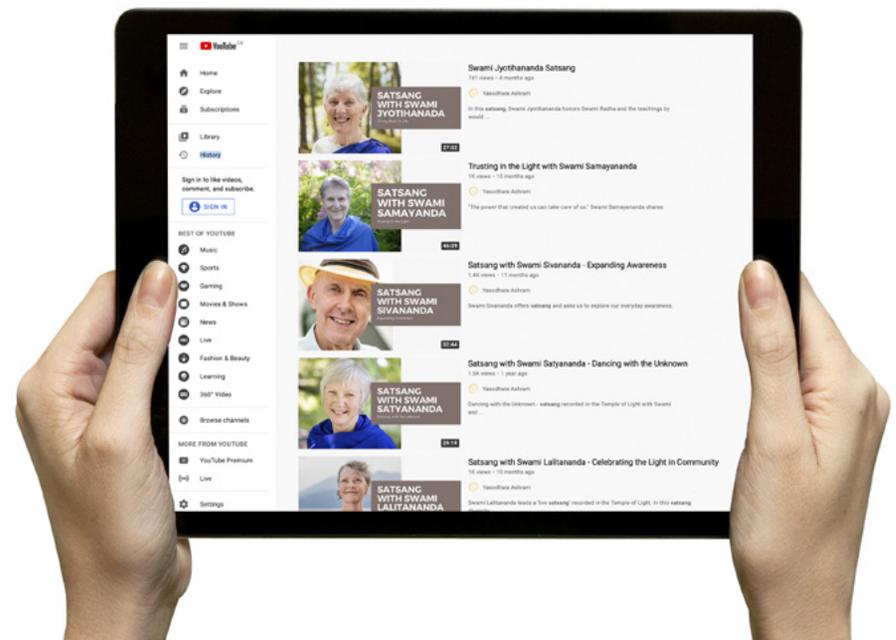
We did offer the Yoga Development Course (YDC) from January through April with 16 students. This was followed by the Hatha Teachers Certification for those students already on site who wanted to continue their studies. The Certification was adapted to become a blend of teacher training and Karma Yoga, and the program, which is usually 10 days, extended over four weeks. Post-YDC students were invited to participate at a price they could afford or free of charge. Many YDCers and karma yogis extended their stays through the summer or beyond because of the uncertain conditions and travel restrictions; also because the Ashram offered a harmonious, creative community, with many advantages not available outside our bubble.

The Ashram population hovered between 40-45 (compared to the average 80-90) during the summer and fall, dipping slightly to 35 in the late fall/winter. It was inspiring to see how we could work together with new approaches that blended Karma Yoga, creativity, teaching and learning.

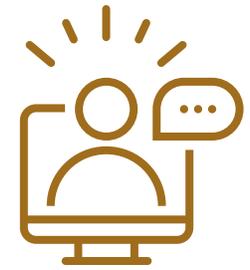
## ONLINE TEACHING

With the arrival of the mid-March lockdown, it was clear we were going to have to cancel all of our remaining 2020 programming. This meant quite a loss financially but even more, a deep sense of potential disconnection from our extended Ashram community. We were determined to find an alternative way to offer the teachings and to stay in touch.

We engaged a consultant to help navigate a platform for online classes, and Ashram teachers began creating two-hour classes, day-long retreats and diverse series of classes. It was a time of creativity and learning. We offered five sessions of various lengths during the year, which together brought in much-needed income. People were also invited to provide remote tech support for online classes, which has involved a half-dozen off-site teachers in a new form of Karma Yoga.



We received so much positive feedback from online course participants that we are enthusiastic about continuing and evolving the online format as one of our teaching vehicles into the future. It's a new way of reaching many people without the complications of travel (and in these times, quarantines). Additionally, we posted satsangs on YouTube throughout the year, which were greatly appreciated by our distant viewers. European Outreach adapted as well, offering online workshops hosted by ashrams in Hungary and Germany. More than 110 people from nine countries participated in online classes and satsangs.



## Online Offerings

**318**

Unique Participants

**93**

First Timers

**848**

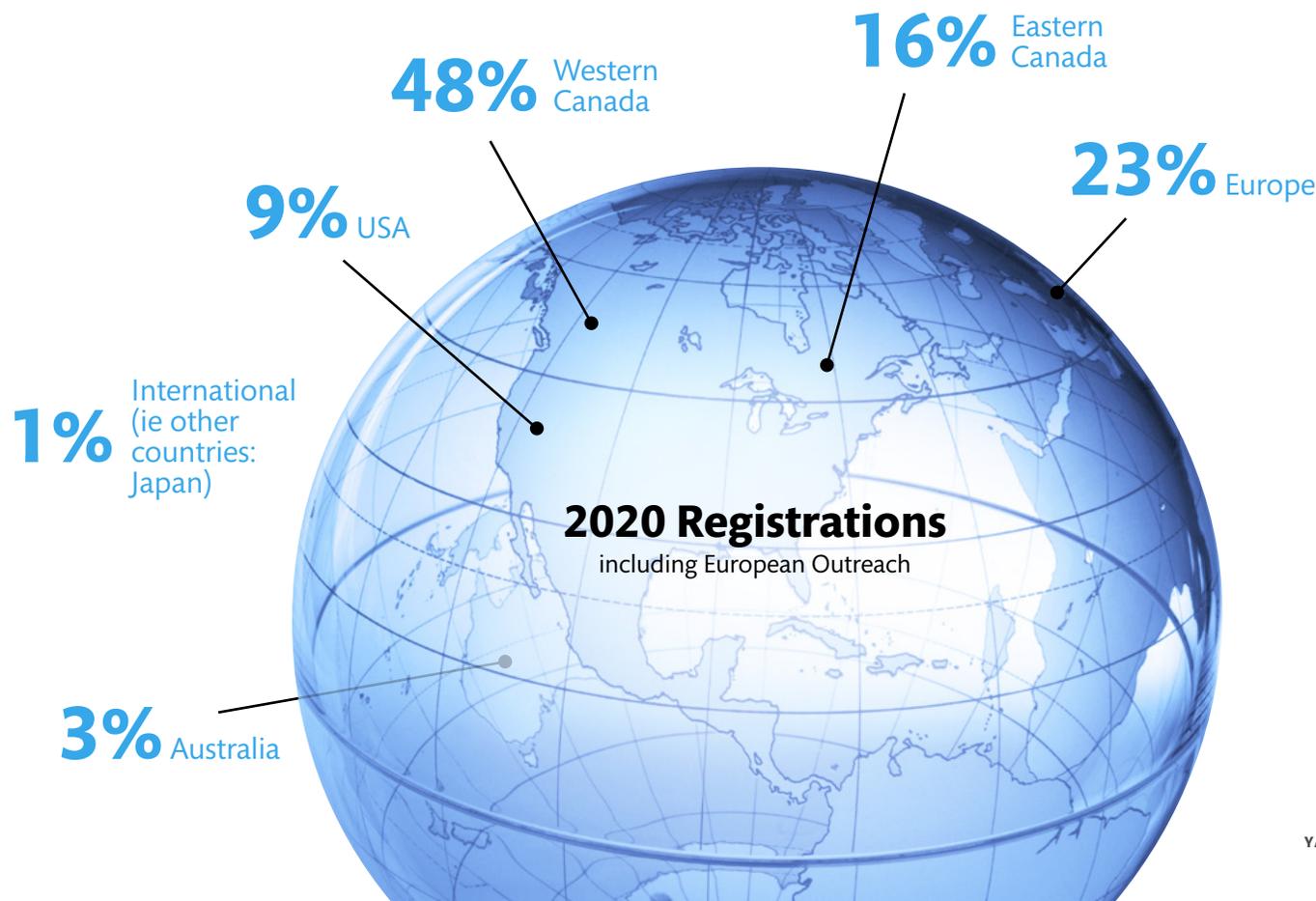
Number of spots filled

**238.5**

Teaching Hours

**\$56,400**

Income Generated



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## KARMA YOGA PROGRAM

From January to mid-March the One Month Karma Yoga Program ran as usual. From mid-March to July, all intakes to the program were cancelled.

In July the program was adapted. It became the Two Month Karma Yoga Program and included a two-week quarantine period. With the longer stay, the Ashram could compensate for the output of energy required to feed, house and support people in quarantine. And the longer stays gave a better experience of community to the karma yogis, with more opportunities to learn, lead and contribute. During the quarantine, people were included in part-time Karma Yoga outdoors and an evolving online class program. Eighteen karma yogis participated in the Two Month Program from July to December.

Intake dates were at first variable in order to allow entry at a time that worked for each individual, but by the fall the intake dates were set and synchronized with the very limited public transport options available in our area. There was a short turnaround before the next intake, and with limited quarantine space it was an active learning process. Communication about the program was expanded through the website and social media.

The Karma Yoga program had more than 100 applicants in 2020. As well as interviews with the program leaders, applicants were asked to take an online course to understand more about the teachings. Logistics such as food delivery systems, liaisons and first aid check-ins were developed to ensure everyone remained connected but safe. Several karma yogis added an extra three months or several weeks to their existing stays



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## PATHWAYS

2020 was our first trial year for the Pathways program, which invites karma yogis to enter longer term residency at the Ashram. We are heartened by the response after introducing it during the summer. The program attracted four participants, whose residency plans range from six months to two years.

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## TEACHERS ON TOUR OUTREACH

This program was transformed to online outreach. The European tour, scheduled with workshops through May, was cut short in March.



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## TEACHER SERVICE PROGRAM

Six teachers participated in this program in 2020, which also included the first two weeks in quarantine before they fully entered the community.

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## RETREATS

This year we had to cancel our usual on-site Artist & Professional retreats as well as guided and self-guided retreats. However, we decided to rent several of the Yasodhara Heights cabins on a short-term basis with minimum two week stays, where people could be on their own retreat with their own food supplies. Most guests enjoyed their stays so much that they extended their time, often combining their own online work with relaxation. Since short-term rentals are a new focus for the Ashram, there were many questions and learnings along the way.

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## TIMELESS BOOKS

In 2020 online sales increased while there was a considerable decrease in gift store book sales since the Ashram was closed to guests for most of the year.

Timeless reprinted *Realities of a Dreaming Mind* and created a new edition of the *Rose Ceremony*. Equipment was purchased for the audiobook production of *Radha: Diary of a Woman's Search*. We are looking forward to having this title as well as others transformed into the popular audio format. We are also exploring a greater online presence for Timeless.

# Collaboration & Connection



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## SUPPORTING LOCAL INITIATIVES

The Ashram continues to support the local Chamber of Commerce, Ambulance Auxiliary and Friends of Kootenay Lake by sitting on their boards—this year via online platforms—and by having a resident volunteer for active duty with the local Fire Department and First Responders.

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## CONNECTING INTERNATIONALLY

### **The Holistic Centers Network (HCN)**

- **Yasodhara Ashram became a member of the HCN** after attending their annual gathering in 2019. There has been great value in networking with international retreat centres and learning from their combined wisdom and concerns, as well as sharing our own experiences. It has been particularly helpful this year, when we all experienced similar pressures of closing land-based programming and finding new ways to sustain our centres.

In May 2020 the HCN converted their in-person gathering to a virtual one, which allowed many members of the Ashram to attend workshops specific to their area and to see how we are part of a larger network. We offered an online satsang, which introduced viewers to the Temple of Light and our practices.

- **Justice Equity Diversity and Inclusivity (JEDI)** - We continued to be part of this committee of retreat centre members who support anti-racism. It was led by experienced teachers who offered practical resources, including access to a six-month program that many Ashram members will attend online in 2021, “Awakening to Whiteness.”
- **Lineage Centres** - Most retreat centres are in beautiful settings and offer rest and relaxation or they host programs led by invited teachers outside their organizations. There is a smaller number carrying forward spiritual lineages like Yasodhara Ashram does. Together we meet monthly to support our evolution and sustainability. We have developed a helpful and supportive alliance and friendship.

### **Nelson Interfaith Climate Action Collaborative**

Yasodhara Ashram continues to be part of this group, which adapted its gatherings to online events in 2020. Events included an Earth Day vigil and an on-line event honouring the UN’s Human Rights Day.

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## GROUPS

Over the past few years group retreats had grown substantially and helped provide a steady income stream for the Ashram, as well as introducing new people to this sacred setting. With the pandemic, all reservations were cancelled. Similarly another course planned in collaboration with a group of educators was put on hold.

# Sustainability & Resilience



**The pandemic was a test of the Ashram's resilience** under stress. As a community, we rose to the challenge with our shift from on-site to online courses and the development of the quarantine protocols for the small stream of karma yogis and teachers coming in. All parts of registration, accommodations and first aid were adapted to work with the new circumstances. We also reduced staffing, which meant the difficult reality of letting go dedicated employees; happily the government buffered the blow with support for laid-off workers. Essential employees were asked to work from home, wherever possible. All Ashram departments took initiative and adapted to change. And together we made it through the year!



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## FOOD SUSTAINABILITY

Our Food Flow team, which includes kitchen, garden, orchard and preserving kitchen, adapted admirably. The kitchen shifted from being primarily employee-led to being more Karma Yoga oriented with our chef still leading. Menus became simpler yet retained the Ashram's well-known nutritional quality and taste experience. Another cooking challenge was meeting the earlier schedule for food delivery to people in quarantine.

We planted a large garden in anticipation of food security issues with COVID-19 and, as a result, we had plenty of fresh produce and were also able to donate some excess to an organization in Creston. By preserving our bountiful fresh greens, we had sufficient to eat through the winter without purchasing additional from afar—a bonus for the kitchen budget and a support for our farm-to-table philosophy.

The orchard benefited from some renewal and expansion projects with additional cherry trees and grapevines, and special treatment for the apple trees. Experienced karma yogis helped tremendously with the harvest of berries and fruits, although cherry and apple harvests were lower compared to 2019.

An innovative approach to teamwork saw the garden and preserving kitchen change harvesting and preserving to a more fluid approach—with harvesting in the morning, then freezing and food preparation in the afternoon, all by the same crew.

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## SUSTAINING OUR BUILDINGS & INFRASTRUCTURE

In 2020 the Infrastructure and Repair & Maintenance team responded to repairs and long-standing issues. We used caution with contractors coming on site, and for the spring and early summer we chose to wait on projects that required indoor work by contractors.

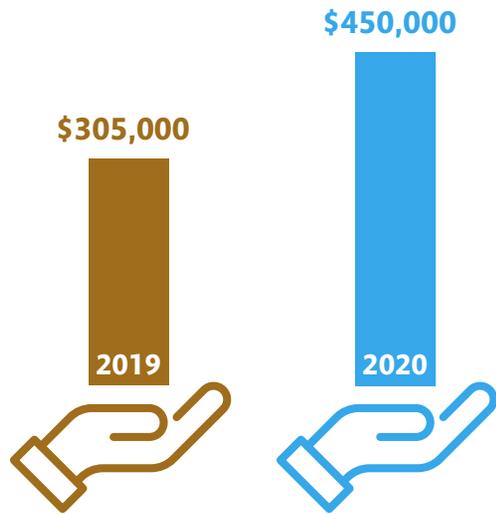
### Major projects accomplished

- Temple of Light roof resurfaced - an excellent result in collaboration with the roofing contractors, construction managers and architects.
- Generator installed at Many Mansions to ensure the comfort of Swami Radhananda in the event of power outages.
- Ganesh re-roofed after many years of being re-tarped.
- Temple heat pump repaired and continues to be monitored.

We continued to work towards comprehensive assessments of our water and waste water systems with 9dot Engineering throughout the year, with the reports to be finalized in spring 2021.







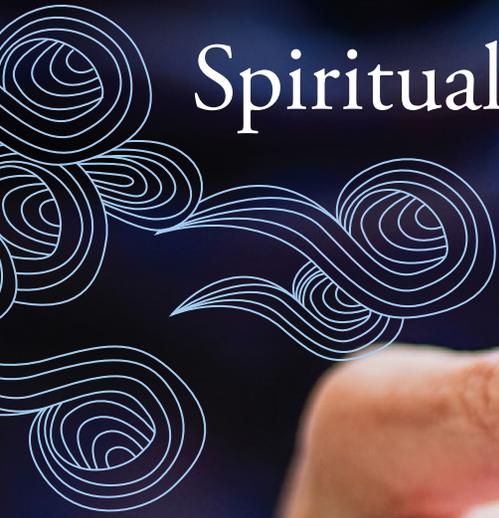
**As the world adjusted to the realities of COVID-19**, the Ashram had to make serious budget cuts knowing that our usual income streams would likely not support expenses. With the pandemic affecting everyone’s lives, even donation income was a question.

By year-end, our community had generously donated \$450,000 – \$200,000 over our budgeted donation income and \$145,000 over 2019 donation income! This included two large donor gifts—one from an individual and the other a legacy gift. Approximately \$140,000 of this year’s total came from our loyal monthly donors.

This support as well as our bare bones budget allowed the Ashram to end the year with a small profit. We are deeply grateful.



# Spiritual Direction & Governance





**Founded by Swami Sivananda Radha**, a Western woman who studied in India in the mid-1950s, Yasodhara Ashram was the first ashram established in Canada. Swami Radha was asked by her teacher to live on faith without working when she returned to Canada. Out of her dedication and courage, the Ashram grew into the flourishing centre it is today.

Swami Radha is a role model for other women and established a lineage of women leaders. Swami Radhananda was president of Yasodhara Ashram Society from 1993 to 2014, building on Swami Radha's work and creating her own legacy of outstanding leadership and innovative teaching. Swami Lalitananda worked closely with both Swami Radha and Swami Radhananda and became president of the Society in 2014.

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### **SPIRITUAL LINEAGE**

In 2020 Swami Lalitananda gave a brahmacharya initiation to a long-term teacher dedicated to Swami Radha's work.

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### **BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Our quarterly Board meetings provide dynamic interaction between the three residential sanyasin directors and the four professionals living outside the Ashram. This year our meetings went online and increased in frequency as we discussed ways forward during the pandemic limitations. The Financial Committee was also active in forecasting and revising the budget in this extraordinary time.

# Financial Overview



**Over its 57-year history,** Yasodhara Ashram has operated on the principles of renunciation and generosity—buying what we need when we need it, without overconsumption. We make our programs financially accessible--offering course discounts, bursaries and scholarships. Donations help support youth, elders, people on limited incomes and racialized peoples to access the Ashram teachings and community.

### **2020 Highlights**

In 2020 the Ashram earned revenue from donations, bequests, the Yoga Development Course, online courses and retreats, residency fees, rentals and investments. The Finance Committee mapped out at the beginning of the pandemic how long the Ashram could sustain itself without our usual programming. We carefully updated the budget each quarter, and were grateful when the year ended with a small profit.

We attribute this success to you—our extended community—through your generous donations and engagement in the online programs. Reducing operational costs to match the reduced on-site population for most of the year, as well as a substantial wage subsidy from the federal government, also supported the Ashram’s financial sustainability in 2020.

Thank you to all!

[Read 2020 Financials here.](#)





# Future Directions



**2020 was announced as our Year of Vision.** What we learned is that our vision needs to be adaptive. What counts in an unpredictable world is an ability to respond quickly and appropriately to change. 2020 became a Year of Resilience. Here is some of what we learned and can apply in the future.

**Longer programs work.** Changing from the one-month to a two-month Karma Yoga Program allowed participants to become more grounded in the teachings, to understand the dynamics of living in community, and to contribute more deeply from a place of understanding. Given this foundation, more people decided to extend their stays. We will maintain the longer Karma Yoga program and once we reopen will also test longer courses and retreats, which would be more manageable from an operational perspective, and could similarly offer participants more depth in their experience of the teachings.

**Online programming works.** The main benefits are easy access to the teachings and less travel. We will continue to offer this layer of online programming even when restrictions are lifted. With climate change, it is helpful to know that the teachings can still be made available. We will continue developing curriculum and expanding platforms, as well as specialty programs. In 2021 we are piloting a “Peace of Mind for Professionals” course.

**Single rooms are popular.** For the 2021 YDC we changed the Guest Lodge rooms from double occupancy to single to accommodate the quarantine period, and we are finding the change meets the needs of our population. Ensuite vs shared bathrooms can also be a price-managed option. We will look at balancing accommodation needs with this direction, as we move forward.

**Caring for our forest is necessary.** We are launching a sustainable logging project in 2021. It’s a fire mitigation measure and also a forward-thinking response to changing climate’s effects on forests, which are already evident in dying cedars and frequent wind storms resulting in blow-downs. This project will retain the larger older trees, clear out fire-hazardous fuels, and is projected to be a net-zero cost through the sale of merchantable logs.

**Emergency back-ups are needed.** We are seeing frequent power outages through severe wind storms, which means more trees falling on power lines. In 2020 we purchased another generator to help us through outages, both with regular operations and with online programs. However most resident and guest accommodations do not have access to generator power in an outage, and we manage with extra blankets and battery-powered lanterns in the cold, dark stormy nights. A future goal is to have a generator that could power all or most of the buildings.

**Succession planning is imperative.** This ongoing concern is more relevant each year as the leadership cohort continues to age. We are focusing on invitation and engagement of next generations. Pathways is an attractive extended residency program (six months to two years or longer), which has met with some success in its trial year of 2020, with younger people taking on essential lead roles in the garden, the welcome centre, the Karma Yoga program and accounting. Many of the younger residents are also committed to further teacher certifications. We look forward to future developments.

**Karma Yoga from home is a gift.** In 2020, with the abundance of online technology, this opportunity to help from home became more apparent. We have benefitted over the years from our creative designer, who offers Karma Yoga from Montreal, and from seamstresses who have provided everything from aprons to face masks. This year we received additional help from those offering tech support for online classes. An accountant and a business administrator from our extended community also took the lead in transitioning the Ashram's accounting system in preparation for outsourcing. What a great direction for the future—helping from where you are!

**Automation/efficiency is on its way.** Part of the accounting transition involves switching programs to an online accounting system. What other areas need streamlining through systems changes? What administrative functions can be outsourced in the future so residents can focus more on teaching? These are questions we will continue to explore in 2021.

**Elders housing is a next step.** With our current cohort of elder residents, we are actively considering next steps. What housing is needed for residents to continue living here as long as possible? And what about the next stage, when our committed residents need more care? What are the options in nearby towns with access to medical facilities and home care help? How much can the Ashram support, and when is it time to move on? We will continue discussions and planning to consider individual and community needs.

**Anti-racism is demanded.** As the veils are lifted, we are seeing the undermining systems and structures that create injustice in our society. As an Ashram and individuals we are taking steps to expand our awareness and act from it. In 2021 we will be furthering our personal and community education. We are also reaching out to the Yaqaan Nukiy people whose unceded territory the Ashram is on, to begin building relationships.

**Knowing where our security lies is at the heart of everything.**

Yasodhara Ashram is a spiritual community built on Swami Radha's faith in the Divine. Our ongoing security continues to lie with our dedication to the Light. That also means expanding our awareness and intelligence, and putting thoughts into action. This year showed that together we can navigate change and offer refuge in the Light of that awareness. And we are grateful to the Divine and to all of you for your support.





**Yasodhara Ashram**  
YOGA RETREAT & STUDY CENTRE

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**SINCE 1963**

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We are a Canadian charity  
and active learning centre.