

DEPARTURES

M A G A Z I N E

FROM THE [JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2009](#) ISSUE

A Retreat to Holy India

Her swami said everything she needed was within, but along the way Marie Brenner also discovered the cushy comforts of Holy India for the five-star set.

By Marie Brenner

The Yoga of Imperishable Reality March 5, 2008

Okay, I am trying to practice stillness. It is my first morning at Shreyas Retreat, a yoga resort about an hour from Bangalore. I am late to chanting class. I am trying not to hyperventilate. On the flight from Kochi I resolved to give up my wheelie bag of wants, desires, and judgments. I am, I tell my yogi Krishna Prakash, going to dedicate myself to the benefit of all sublime living beings. I am going to get way beyond my sense of ego and self-centeredness. But can Krishna arrange a driver to get me through the rutted roads to Puttaparthi, to the Mahashivaratri celebration at the Sai Baba Ashram? Tens of thousands are expected to show up for the aging holy man, who still packs them in, and I don't want to miss it. "Madam! Shiva's birthday today! Impossible to get prayer pass at Sai Baba's temple. Sai Baba producing a lingam from his mouth! He promises a miracle! He has a need to be colorful. Madam! Roads are impossible. Sai Baba is four hours away."

"So many wants, no wonder you are lost." The voice of the universal yogi plays like an endless spool in my head. I collapse on a mat. "This morning we are mastering the chanting of the bee," an instructor announces, speaking in the odd formal style of the Subcontinent, a low mumble of marbles in the mouth. The Brahmari, he explains, is a breathing technique favored by holy men and hedge fund managers from Mumbai feeling much stress about the crash in the Indian stock market. "Great relief in this certain noise," he says, "a long vibrato and chant that buzzes and vibrates up the nostrils, through the ears."

Bzzz bzzz, bzzz bzz bzzz. Bzz bzz.

The banging and the car horns and the drums from the local village shatter the morning stillness. I try to keep my mind focused on the buzz and the breathing and the nearby grove of banana trees and shut out the *vritti*, the monkey mind of conflicting thoughts such as "How long would it take to drive to Bangalore and check out the new designer department store Folio?"

After class I walk with Krishna down a long path toward the organic garden. "Who was your teacher?" I ask him. Was Krishna a follower of the distinguished late swami Rama? Or the late swami Vivekananda, who cruised the West toward the end of the 19th century, sharing the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita? Or a more current swami, the 82-year-old cricketer Parthasarathy, who identifies himself on his brochures as an esteemed YPO resource, making reference to the Young Presidents' peer-based leadership organization? Or perhaps Amma, the hugging saint?

There is a silence. Then Krishna fixes me with the opaque gaze that expresses a kaleidoscope of emotions and explains that his teacher was Sri Shankar Narayan, whom he met in 1997 in Delhi while completing a postgraduate degree in business management. He tells me he is self-publishing a new book on the Gita. "I have a unique title!" he tells me. "I will deliver it to your room!"

The Pull (and push) of India

To get to Shreyas from the Middle East, I land not at Bangalore's international airport but in Kochi, formerly Cochin, in the glorious south of India. It is March, festival month. The Jet Airways pilot announces every score of a tense cricket match. India is perhaps the only country where the landing card has three boxes to choose from in the Purpose of Trip category: Business, Tourist, Spiritual. We drift down to the tarmac, into a rose sunset and an uplifting sight—a line of white Ambassadors with drivers holding up signs: chatterjee, bannerjee, sharma, singh, holy bible association, welcome!

The pull of India immediately takes me across. For the past few years I have been filling notebooks with scenes of the new globalization. But in none of my previous trips to India have I ever been to an ashram, not the traditional dusty holes where the mice scramble over your feet and you are awakened at four in the morning, where you sit for 12 hours chanting and scrub toilets to get to holiness. Nor to five-star retreats like Shreyas in the south or Ananda in the Himalayas where, it is said, Richard Gere, Russian oligarchs, and Bollywood beauties can be found. So I leap when my editor at *Departures* shoots me an e-mail with the following assignment: "Hey, how about *Eat, Pray, Love* for the hot-flash set?"

On the road to Shreyas, child barbers with neatly appointed stands share the sidewalk with puja powdered-paint vendors ramping up for the Holi festival, the mass paint fight of Dhuleti and spring celebration that overtakes the country every March. India is defined by its

villages but also by the roads that connect them. Blow-horn trucks covered in vibrant murals compete for space with motor scooters. Women in pink and yellow cling to the drivers, their *dupattis* sailing into the wind. Pigs, oxen, yellow-green autorickshaws like bright beetles scurry home. Diesel fumes and dust and the perfume of a temple mix in the air. We pass villages of gray cement storefronts and square brick houses, men napping on woven cots, and women carrying bundles of dried-dung bricks, used for fuel, on their heads.

In the cities the zooming young professionals and intellectuals are addicted to www.RealPolitics.com and use the word “deracination” at dinner parties to define their fear that all the sweeping changes will strip India of its cultural identity. The term you hear everywhere is “branding.” Big-name Western status symbols have the middle class in a buying frenzy.

Some of the country’s elites are wary of—even snobbish about—Western-style consumerism, though. There’s a movement to publish new books in Hindi and to fight the malls, the branding, the invasion of Bottega Veneta, luxury conferences, and the Louis Vuitton cakes that are this season’s chic centerpieces for Delhi hostesses. In a recent column in *Time Out Mumbai*, the economist Gaurav Mishra described his own personal backlash against materialism. He resolved to give up everything he owned for a year (“All the accumulated acquisitions of an intellectual yuppie”), along with his sea-facing house and fast-track job, in order to explore the corrupting addiction to the things that accompany prosperity.

Most Indians are not burdened with an excess of consumer goods, of course. Yet, at the moment here, there’s a troubling fad of reinterpreting Holy India for the five-star crowd. There has always been a thriving center of rationalist entrepreneurs, scientists, and secularists who know how to turn trends into quick profits. How else to understand the empires established by the platoons of nouveau billionaires: the geniuses behind computer giant Infosys, call centers, Bollywood, vast industries of pharmaceuticals, and Amma, the plump hugger of Kerala who tours the world and, more than 25 million hugs later, has built hospitals, schools, and computer centers with the profits.

Now Shreyas has adopted the empowerment slogans from the West. The journey of self-discovery replaces the Sanskrit terms that have always lured seekers. What we are talking about is cashing in on *turiya*, the highest state of consciousness, much favored by the poet Allen Ginsburg, who was in and out of the ashrams of Rishikesh before The Beatles were. It is a state most recently explored by the writer Elizabeth Gilbert, who details her experience in the captivating memoir *Eat, Pray, Love*. Surely a glimmer of *turiya* is worth the 22-hour flight. But all this way for something I can get in California?

Close your eyes at places like the Oberoi resorts outside Jaipur and Udaipur and you are on a Bollywood set, the texture of India replaced by the unnerving, ersatz, Americanized cartoonishness of lawn sweepers in *Kerala* costumes, with bowing staff in kurtas and turbans raining namastes on the Butterfield & Robinson crowd. These new resorts remind me of a scene in a Broadway musical: *Kerala!* They are posh, for sure, but they are India without the India-ness. The ragged joy and dusty grandeur and inconvenience are smoothed out in Pixar colors.

At first I find it disconcerting to pull into Shreyas, one of the Indian destination resorts touted by swanky specialists. It rises like a tumor of the new globalization, a Golden Door amid the rubble of villages. Nearby, trains on their way north to the Punjab howl past. Hundreds of passengers hang off the trains, a timeless scene. A long beige wall separates Shreyas from the chaos of the road, then a gate opens to reveal vistas of gardens, staff gliding quietly to lead me to my room. I arrive at night. There is an arc of silence, as if I have wandered into an ashram in mid-*darshan*. “Where is everyone?” I ask Krishna, who walks me down a path by a pool.

“Madam, it is a little quiet right now,” he replies.

“Am I the only guest?”

“There are two others,” he says, “but they leave tomorrow for two days.” Mystery surrounds this announcement.

My room is comfortable but not luxurious, with a devotional from the Bhagavad Gita on the wall. In the bathroom is a vase of tuberose and a view out to the pool, a stack of books on the Gita, and a few suggested yoga classes and massage sessions. The next morning the staff knocks frequently to see if I want another glass of freshly squeezed juice. Across the road the village of Nelamangala prepares for the Shiva festival that will take place the following day.

There is nothing casual about the event. India will shut down for two days, and the clamor of horns and drums is breaking the morning meditations, interrupting our flow toward brahmacharya, the exalted state in which I must learn to shun all vulgar people and past times. I am trying not to think about the moral implications of trying to get to this high state of consciousness at a resort that costs \$500 a night, more money than hundreds of millions of Indians make in a year of hard labor.

Krishna is one of the millions in the new India who are scrambling, driven by big plans. The phrase you hear to describe such people is Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen’s “the Jews of the next century.” He could be thinking of Krishna, for whom the Bhagavad Gita, a central text of Hinduism, presents a path not just to inspiration but also to aspiration. Krishna will not be daunted by the fact that in Delhi today there is a geyser of new books on the Gita, with its principles of holy nonattachment and prayer being reinterpreted into work-is-worship themes to suit the country’s new busyness. In some segments of India, devotionals have been almost eclipsed by the concerns of global ambitions. Now the hot-button mantra in India is “work.”

The new Indian Tony Robbins figures—Swami Parthasarathy, Sadhguru J. Vasudev of the Isha Foundation—fascinate me with their hard sell, which has morphed for today’s global economy. You see and hear them at conferences, flying with their entourages in white kurtas to YPO sessions at the Aspen Institute and the World Economic Forum in Davos.

“I don’t read the Gita,” Sadhguru told me the first time I met him. He was staying with a large group way outside Delhi near Gurgaon, a sprawling suburb of malls and corporate headquarters. I found him in a golf club development that was being thrown up by a property lord. He’s a golfer and a schmoozer who brags about his perfect memory and sports a Santa Claus beard, rapper sunglasses, a T-shirt, and a definite weight issue. All around him baby boomers and yuppie Indians were hyperventilating into a trance with a breathing technique perfected at his foundation. Would I like to attend a \$1,800 VIP session for three days in California to learn it? “I just turned over my property to Sadhguru,” one man said at lunch. “I feel so cleansed. I am proud he has a center in what was once my home in Delhi. And that my family and I can be of service.”

Krishna’s eyes shine with parallel possibility. When we meet he has been up for days, typing PowerPoint presentations into a computer from the tiny office at Shreyas. There is nothing in his particular circumstance—a small house, unpaved streets—that will stop his wellspring of driving hope and ambition, the center-of-the-universe engine that propels the new India into the middle class. It is a small leap into a bright future fueled by dreams honed in tiny houses and small schools where students eat a government meal of dal and chapatis off banana leaves and plot how to ace a standard exam to qualify for Varanasi University.

The Journey Begins, CA. 2004

Back then the Chanel boutique at the Imperial hotel in New Delhi had not yet made its way to India, but malls and luxury brands were beginning to appear.

“They want me to go white-water rafting in Rishikesh! What do I wear?” I hear the voice in a tiny storefront sports shop in Khan market, near an exclusive residential area of Delhi. We are in the early days of the new globalization and the puppy (Punjabi urban princess) is out shopping with her mother-in-law and husband. Outside the market the drivers of Delhi ladies wait by their cars. On the sidewalk the guy with no legs and a dhoti cruises up and down on his wheelie board greeting strawberry sellers. I have gone in search of a bathing suit, which was still kept then, for modesty’s sake, out of sight, wrapped in plastic in the storeroom. The puppy frets about what is appropriate to wear for rafting down the Ganges. “I will get soaked!” she says. “I have read about this practice!”

The first signs of India About to Diet are just on the horizon. For generations the traditional workout for elite women here has been yoga asanas and slow walks around the cricket pitch. The notion of exercise, of body obsession, was limited to Bollywood stars and anyone who came in and out of the West. No one minded the pillowy midribs that peeked through saris on the buffet lines.

“What is this white-water rafting, madam?” I watch the somber clerk pinwheel into incomprehension, then offer a voluminous pleated tracksuit that went out of fashion in the early days of disco. “Something like this, madam?” he asks.

I cannot stop myself: “But you’ll get drenched! Wear a bathing suit with a shirt over it.” I am met with a polite, icy silence. Uh-oh, I have stepped over the forbidden line. She offers her credit card and walks out with yards of nylon, moving slowly, as if through gel.

The following year the first of a new breed of weight-training studios sets up in Mumbai. A small spa opens with a flourish in the center of town. A line of beggars is outside the door.

The interior is impeccable, practically antiseptic. A woman in white touts, “The first wheatgrass-juice machine in India!” With great fanfare she opens a nearby refrigerator to show me wheatgrass imported from the West, vacuum-packed like beluga caviar. Could luxe yoga retreats be far behind? Shreyas, with its screening room stocking complete sets of *Frasier* DVDs and a flatscreen that beams in CNN India, is a long psychic journey from the mass 12-hour in-breath, out-breath sessions that once tortured *vipassana* acolytes in spartan cubicles, looking for enlightenment.

The One-Pointed Mind, March 9, 2008

I have been up late at Shreyas, reading the Ishopanishad, one of the shortest of the Upanishads, a classic text of Vedanta. It has been left by my bed, and inside it someone has circled the definition of *nishkama* karma, action without desire for rewards. This state, according to Swami Rama, is made possible by selflessness and the feeling of oneness with all. So I am trying to get out of my New York habit of looking around this spa and trying to understand why I am, more or less, the only guest.

There is a card in my room that says, “The prime purpose of your stay at Shreyas is (a) to learn yoga processes or (b) to learn more about integrating yoga in your life.” How to explain to Krishna and the well-meaning Shreyas staff that within a five-block area of my Manhattan house there are classes all day long in every kind of yoga—Ashtanga, Vinyasa, Bikram—in a dozen studios? That there is an entire world of women who practice power yoga and warrior flow and that the industry in America is thriving? Ahead of me at Shreyas is a four-day schedule of Ayurvedic possibilities, a few gentle Vinyasa classes (a workout in which I will try my headstand with the staff), languorous strolls to the local village to serve meals at the government school, and a cooking lesson from Rajan, a superb organic chef who was once employed by the Indian embassy. Like all chefs, even in the new India that officially shuns the caste system, he is surely a Brahmin, barefoot in the kitchen, the shrine of holy food.

I soon fall into a routine, giving myself over to the lack of real activity. I avoid the tiny gym with its wheezing treadmill, opting for desultory jogs on the running path. Using any excuse, I try to lure Krishna to take me on walks through the rice fields outside the walls so I can take pictures of the murals of Air India jets, Hindi-English word charts, and the enigmatic smile of Gandhi decorating the local school. The high point is at 11 a.m., when the staff meets for yoga in their street clothes. I join and try to vanish into invisibility, hoping they will ignore the *ferengi*, whom they ordinarily treat like a Ming vase. Then it is time for a Balinese massage in a small shack with an

outdoor shower and, afterward, a real test of my lack of discipline, in the form of the lunch feast at a table set for one. The afternoon offers a stirring session of yoga *nidra*, a form of deep relaxation, and then the hard decision: Do I lounge in the special gazebo in the vegetable garden or by the pool? The Shreyas magic begins to take over. I hear that voice again in my head, saying “Everything you need is within.”

Am I really going to be the only guest? As I write, I am being stared at by Santosh Kumar, who would be cast in a Bollywood spa drama as the Faithful Manservant Always by Your Side. He is driving me a bit crazy, I have to admit, though I am devoted to his care and his exquisite flower arrangements. Santosh seems to have an additional goal: Can the *ferengi* gain four pounds in four days? At the moment, he bombs me with extra dosas that squirt butter, tempts me with the freshest chutney of grated coconut. My diet worksheets from Jordan Carroll, Upper East Side nutritionist, have slipped under the bed as I collapse under the shower of cashews and vats of cardamom rice pudding. At breakfast, lunch, and dinner I cannot resist the long white table with rose petals strewn across the linen. Santosh, trained in hotel management at Bangalore Academy, stands at one side, waiting to fulfill my every wish. More *dosas*? Cashews? *Chiku* fruits?

Santosh is not forthcoming about the rumored other guests. But soon two slim Brits with shaggy hair appear, looking like sleepy puppies. They mumble their names, Zak and Sharna. I wonder, Are they celebrity rockers hiding out from fans? At breakfast Zak mumbles again. “I am a musician.” And Sharna sings. Hmm. No clues there. They mention this is their first trip to India, whomped up with two days’ notice by punching “yoga retreat India” into Google. Shreyas’s was the first site to come up. And by the way, they are off to Sai Baba’s retreat.

I fight off a powerful stirring of envy. How come them and not me? How do I get on his Shiva celebration list of VIPs? Zak turns out to be Zak Starkey, drummer for The Who and Oasis and son of Ringo Starr, whom he resembles. By the age of 12 he was performing publicly, a fact he announces softly, with hooded eyes. It is a clear signal to steer the conversation away from all matters Beatles. He and Sharna Liguz hide at Shreyas, preparing for the launch of their new group, Penguins.

“India is cool,” Sharna says. “I never thought it would look like this.”

I wish them well in their time with Sai Baba. “It should be amazing,” Sharna says as she bids me goodbye, off for 48 hours with the devotees and a road clogged with masses carrying devotionals and golden crowns of Shiva heads on their own heads.

“Madam, you will do much better to watch Sai Baba on YouTube,” Krishna says. “There is much controversy that surrounds him.”

I follow Krishna to the office and for the next hour watch a mirage of materializations in the form of wads of who knows what coming from Sai Baba’s mouth as he covers it with a towel.

A few days later Zak and Sharna stumble back from their trip to the ashram and collapse by the pool looking exhausted. On my last night at Shreyas, the three of us meet outside in the Sylvan gardens. We lounge on pillows by an astonishing spread that Santosh has set up by the pool. Dozens of candles and roses and tureens of vegetarian stews cosset us, as does the deep quiet. As I leave, Krishna hands me a thick envelope. Inside is a pristine copy, just off the press, of *Fellow Seeker* by Krishna Prakash. “I would very much like to come to your country one day,” Krishna says as he hands me the gift.

Silence is the Sign of the Well-Developed Intellect, March 11

I have traveled north to Ananda in the Himalayas. I am on India time, which means that I am, unapologetically, late again. This time I do not hyperventilate on the way to Vedanta class. The above silence koan has become my operating instruction. After a week of luxury spa life at Shreyas, I have absorbed this expensive lesson. Or maybe it is the magic of Ananda, rated the world’s best spa by a cluster of magazines. There is a reason for this. Nestled high in the Himalayas on the grounds of the Viceregal Palace of the Maharaja of Tehri Garhwal, it has refined the international spa formula yet kept the essence of India at its core. Yes, it is pricey. And yes, the place attracts rich Manhattanites and Swiss bankers, but there is also a 21,000-square-foot spa with Ayurvedic massages that fill a three-page list. And there’s the trainer who could compete with Equinox’s. And there’s his sense of absurdity as he details the exercise regimes of most middle-class Indian women. “Walk to the buffet. Rest. Tell the driver, ‘Home.’ Turn on Indian soap operas. Ask the maid for tea and biscuits.”

My room has a picture window that overlooks the Himalayas and the Ganges. There is a Jacuzzi and a peerless spa shower. You eat on a deck with the same vista and wander back and forth from spa to dining room. It is about as perfect a spa setting as is possible to imagine, and from the moment I see the books of the maharaja’s preserved in his library, I plot to extend my trip for as long as they will keep me.

We meet outside at seven in the morning on the yoga mats and watch the clouds play over the mountaintops, taking in that view to the Ganges and the frayed ashrams of Rishikesh far beneath. Yoga is conducted by stern taskmasters fighting for attention with an assembly of peacocks, which stroll near the mats. If it mists, your headstand will be interrupted by the sight of spreading tails.

Getting to Ananda requires rushing to the 6:50 a.m. Shatabdi Express train in Delhi, darting through the crowd of luggage wallahs balancing stacks of suitcases on their heads. Then the ride is four or five hours, depending on the condition of the tracks, in a luxury coach that seems to date back to the time of Mrs. Gandhi. The ride is a thrill. Mother India just out as you travel north into the peaks.

In a field there are women pushing oxen who look to have been painted by Tagore. In Haridwar, a jumble town still a good hour from Ananda, painters work on a banner: Welcome 3rd all India open rafting champion. And then the road, the hairpin turns up the mountain,

passing through Rishikesh into a quiet landscape and the joy of another sign. I ask the driver to stop so I can photograph it. If you are a collector of evidence of the yin and yang and oddities of globalization, this one is a prize. A large boulder in the mountain, painted to catch the eye of the village population, reads *The makers*. Spoken English and personality development. Call center interview and preparation \$\$\$\$\$. Run by flight attendant Vinay Badoni (rtd).

Late morning. The breeze ruffles the pines on the grounds of the Viceregal Palace, once presided over by an oddball of a maharaja who produced an unsettling smattering of crypto-fascist literature, some of which is preserved in his library, now used as a computer room for the spa.

I resist the weakness of faintheartedness on encountering a book called *Yisroel: The First Jewish Omnibus*. It sits on a shelf with strange books by German professors trying to explain the Nazi war machine.

Not entirely irrelevant is the question, Can you control the mind? You have to hand it to the Ananda staff: They have taken Werner Erhard's EST trainings from the seventies and fluffed them up to be as Eastern as they are Western. Erhard made his fortune with the quick and useful sound bite "It is what it is." Jimmy Carter was in the White House, lines formed at gas stations, and the president from Georgia decreed no hard liquor be served at state dinners. At this ripe moment the spa industry took off in America and Erhard struck it rich even while insisting that his seminars run seven or so hours without bathroom breaks. His ride was swift and bracing before he crashed. So in the shining new India, why not test an Eastern version of EST in the misty Himalayas, the setting of eternal wisdom and so much want?

The ideas are presented by two dreamy followers of Swami Parthasarathy. They are usually found across the country in Pune, at the elaborate Vedanta Academy, run by the Vedanta Cultural Foundation. From the first, there is the echo of Erhard in their pitch: You must come! Can we call you? Put your name on the sign-up sheet. Can you send us your e-mails? We will follow up.

I admit, I am hooked. I like the dialogue. "Likes and desires can drive you crazy." "The mind will jump from one thing to another." "We have to approach situations with no expectations." "When the ego asserts itself, go limp." Soon I stop booking massages to be instead with the Pune Moonies at Vedanta class.

Each Day a Different Sign

What is Swadharma? I fill my notebook with such terms, and this one, I will learn, is the notion of individualism, of one's own law of action, and it's one of the core concepts of the Gita. Or, to my cynical Western mind, a pathetic rationale propped up to explain why a significant portion of the more than 300 million middle-class Indians can seem oblivious to the almost 400 million others who are living on less than \$1 a day.

I also have, as part of the curriculum, in my notebook the terms *Tamas*, *Rajas*, and *Sattwa*, classifications of personality. The *Tamas* is the lazy sloth who indulges and refuses to turn away from dosas or Häagen-Dazs. The *Rajas* type comprises the work-as-worship bling-bling crowd, busy all the time on their hamster wheels of pointlessness. And then there are the holy warriors of the *Sattwa* type, struggling always, even at \$600-a-night Ananda, for that arc of wisdom, that perfect Ayurveda moment, the understanding that Parthasarathy says comes with the idea of Western as Eastern. I take all this to dinner and sit next to an Indian banker from New Jersey.

"Do not be so foolish," he says. "The real gurus, one never sees. And if you are making notes from the West, they will continue to hide from you."

The Ananda staff are at their best when lecturing on how to manage expectations, using Swami's 50-odd years of marriage as an example. I will paraphrase the story: "Marriage? How do we do it? I wake up and I see my irritable wife. She has always been irritable. When I married her she was irritable. I ask her if she wants tea and she barks at me! I am happy! I know that I am in the correct house! I know that I am not lost! That I am exactly where I am supposed to be."

Soon I sneak out of class and make my way down the pathway of the Ananda palace, go through the gate, and take in the vast panorama outside the cushy confines of the spa. For the moment, the clamor of the outside world stills. In my first days of wanting to understand India, Erhard was setting up in Los Angeles and I was studying *An Area of Darkness*, V. S. Naipaul's 1964 account of his travels in the country. I used his chapter title "A Resting Place for the Imagination" to understand the mysteries of a world unknown to me. I had written a note to myself, even then, that I later noticed jotted in a margin: "The horizon is infinite and grand." The lesson was within.

To get to **Shreyas**, fly to Bangalore International Airport from Mumbai or New Delhi. It's all vegetarian cuisine and no alcohol at this upscale yoga retreat. Both pool and garden cottages are \$500 per night (www.shreyasretreat.com). **Ananda** is an hour-long flight from New Delhi, or a four-and-a-half-hour train or limousine ride. Rooms and villas range from \$575 to \$2,025 a night (www.anandaspa.com).