SVADHYAYA

Volume 5, Issue 3 A Newsletter from The Iyengar Yoga Centre of Hong Kong June 2008

Hong Kong yogis, Olivia Tang, Kitty Wong, Linda Shevloff, Caroline Roy, Ursula Moser and George Dovas in British Columbia for a workshop with Geeta Iyengar and for the AGM of the Iyengar Yoga Association there.

By Linda Shevloff

The past month has been one that brought both joys and sorrows. While the sages tell us that emancipation comes when we can move beyond joys and sorrows, beyond pleasure and pain, it is difficult to understand how to do this when witnessing such disasters as the recent earthquake in China or the flood devastation in Myanmar.

Early in May a group of teachers and trainees from this studio had the privilege and pleasure of traveling to the beautiful mountain setting of Yasodhara Ashram in British Columbia to study yoga with Geeta Iyengar. The following week we went with her to the Okanogan Valley where she taught a second workshop for the Iyengar Yoga Association of Canada. Her teaching was clear and brilliant and we all felt such happiness to be there. We were among friends, studying together, uniting with the wider yoga community. It was a Rocky Mountain high, to be sure.

Shortly after we returned to Hong Kong a huge earthquake shook Sichuan province and left great carnage and ruin in its wake. At the same time, watching the news or reading the newspaper we learned of the suffering in Burma where no aid relief was getting to the people in the flooded Irawady Delta. While these events were not directly happening to us here in Hong Kong, they have been extremely painful to see.

This issue of Svadhyaya focuses on these two events. In Canada Geeta spoke about the meaning of Karma and she explained some philosophical points very well so that we could better understand this concept. I will go through the notes that I jotted down when she spoke and use them for an article about karma.

In May there was a fundraising workshop at The Iyengar Yoga Centre and we sent all the proceeds to The Red Cross Disaster Relief Fund in China. Altogether the workshop raised $13,500 Hong Kong dollars. It felt good to send something to China to help, and I think it also helped us to come together and reflect on life and death and meaning. Andrew Horner and Theresa Wenk found some inspirational passages that could be used during the session. They were read out loud at various times during the class. A few students have asked to have these in print, and so they are included in this issue. There is a Biblical passage from Corinthians, one from The Bhagavad Gita, one from Mahtma Gandhi, something from St. Augustine, and a prayer from the Sioux Indians of North America. The pieces are all beautiful.

Also in this issue there are some press reviews about Father Joe Periera. He is a Senior Iyengar Yoga teacher and a Catholic priest who will be teaching a workshop at our Centre in Hong Kong in July. His workshop will be built around the idea of healing. This does not mean that the workshop is for the sick or the injured in a literal way. What it means is that we all have weaknesses, regrets and suffering. We all are tying to survive in the world, but in so doing we can neglect the most important things in life. The practice of yoga can help us to realign ourselves. It brings us home to our inner direction and it sets us free.

An article by student Angela Tam concludes the issue. She ponders the question: Is yoga a product or a discipline.

I hope that you enjoy the issue.♥

Karma Yoga

From A Talk by Geeta Iyengar

Yasodhara Ashram, a yoga retreat and study centre in the mountainous Kootenay region of British Columbia, Canada was the venue for a week long workshop with Geeta Iyengar. The ashram was started over forty years ago by Swami Sivananda Radha, a female disciple of Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh. Yasodhara Ashram is a "karma yoga" centre where people come to learn about themselves and the principles of yoga by doing mindful work. Though the group of ninety of us were there to study Iyengar yoga, Geeta took the opportunity to talk to us about the concept of karma yoga. Here are some of my notes from her talk. She said much more than this…

Linda

Yoga is one. It is for our convenience we divide it and give it names. After dividing it we think that the yoga explained by Patanjali is different from the yoga of Krishna and Arjuna. But if we read all the yogic texts, finally we come to the conclusion that all yoga is one.

We human beings may be coming from different countries, but otherwise as human beings we have intelligence, emotions, and physiology, the same. Tastes in food may be different, but food and water is essential for everyone. As human beings we don't differ much.

All of us have the same type of problems. Sometimes we are happy, sometimes sad, sometimes we have body pain. No person is left without disease. Everything is common. In different lands there might be some differences, but sufferings are with all of us. Problems and obstacles are there.

We face problems, continue to live, and yet the problems are there. We have to know where our origin is. When we penetrate deeply, we find it is our own depth inside. A human being is born out of karma. We don't take birth out of the blue. There is a definite link from other lives to the present life.

If we think we were born on such and such a day and then one day we die, it makes no sense. There is continuity in life. In ayurveda it is said that the jiva of a human being enters in with the karma at the moment of conception. It is our will that helps us to take this shape.

We are at first considered "karma purushas". We are born with karma. There is a reason behind our birth. We are "rashi purushas". Rashi means "heap". We are born in nature or prakriti. We all have intelligence, consciousness, ego, senses of perception, organs of action, five elements and their infrastructure. We all have that.

In Sadhana Pada, Patanjali said that the accumulated imprints of past lives, rooted in afflictions, will be experienced in present and future lives. We come with karmas.

What is the karma we do? Often we think we are doing good karmas. No. We do have to do good karmas, but the root of action is in the afflictions (kleshas) we face. Ignorance, ego, aversions, clinging to life and fear of death are kleshas. All actions we do are based in the afflictions.

Right now at present this is a known birth – we are here. Later and earlier births are unkown to us, but they can be felt by us.

Sometimes we say "not in this life, but next life." This idea automatically comes to us. We may not get that car in this life but in the next birth…(laughter) We form desires looking at so many things. These kinds of hidden desires are always there. These desires are "vasanas". The basic desire is to take birth again so that life does not end with death.

Moment by moment goes from present to past and we think of the future. In this manner we go to the future and the past and we miss the present moment. On these desires the vasanas of our life are built.

The word "bhoga" has two different meanings. It means both "enjoyment" and "destiny". Sometimes events happen and you can't give the reason. It can be your bhoga or destiny. If we ask, "why did this happen?" but we can't give a reason, the root may have started earlier. It started in the past somewhere.

Sometimes we get a disease and we try to find out why. The causes and origins are earlier – they are not immediate.

Patanjali says that when we take birth in different spans of life, some births will give happiness and some will give suffering. …"Punyapunya hetutatvat" Pleasures and pains are caused by our virtues and vices. We should use our assets in the proper way. It is up to us whether we want to do virtuous work or the wrong things. We are liable for what we do…

What is that which carries our karmas? It is not the same as nature or"prakriti" (the material world) . A black box on a plane can tell if a pilot went wrong or if something went wrong with the plane. For us that black box is karma. We already have the black box that will be opened when we go. It is in a subtle form. All of these imprints are in a subtle form. We have to keep cleansing it. That is why we need kriya yoga (Kriya yoga is the yoga of action that includes zeal in Practice, Self study and Surrender to God.) This is the same as saying we are to do karma yoga, jnana yoga and bhakti yoga. The Bhagavad Gita tells us we are to follow our duty in life. Patanjali says we must do Yamas, Niyamas, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana, Samadhyah.

There are many terms but the subject is really one.

The main problem is that we are born with desires. We do something and we think "what are we going to get out of it?" Sometimes our intentions are not good. Pride, jealousy, infatuation etc. can be behind our acts. We can perform our actions with these ideas in the background. Sometimes acts that look good have bad motives. Some people even pray with ambitions. If actions are tainted by mental disturbances then they are not real acts of karma yoga even if from the outside they appear to be karma yoga.

To do pure karma yoga, you should not hanker after results. The mental attitude should be desireless and dispassionate. Right actions need to be there in the course of life. Sensitivity has to come, to know what is right and what is wrong. And, you create more karma by avoiding action.

We need to do action in such a way that we do not have ambitions for the fruit of our acts. Then the mind is free. We can't just run away from action.

We do also have to see that when we are given a better chance in this life that we live it in the proper way. If we are given a better life then we have to do better work. Desires don't go right away, but find better desires. Do good work.

Help people. Build things for the benefit of human beings so that others benefit. Do that karma in such a way that it is an offering to the Lord. Otherwise all of us are attached to results. Think twice about your motives.

Think about what you do. Sometimes you might do an action because someone else has told you to do it, but it is the wrong work for you. On the plane they say don't take any packages from strangers as you don't know what is inside. What if it is a bomb? If you don't know what you are carrying, don't give consent to it. When giving consent to something, observe whether it is good or bad. Is the money being used by an orphanage or a prostitution house? When you give consent to something, what are you giving consent to?

You have a chance to cleanse yourself by doing virtuous work without any desire. That is what karma yoga is.

A sanyasi is someone who has taken the dress and vows of a yogi.. To be a real sanyasi, you have to act from the heart. A sanyasi is one, who, like in the ritual when water is poured into his hand, realizes that the water is not mine. When you give, you should realize that nothing is mine. Nothingness has to be felt. As long as you think of me, myself and I, that state is not there.

We are born with karma. Only when desire goes is there freedom from birth and death. Like climbing Everest, training is needed. Every level requires special training. At every altitude you have to adjust yourself. Gradually progress and get acclimatized to that state. If you don't get acclimatized, you will fall. That is Sadhana. The higher you go, the deeper the penetration has to be.

Don't ask the question, "What is the effect of this asana?" This question is just at sea level or below sea level. We have to build up ourselves.

That is why prayers are helpful At the beginning of each day we pray that God will protect our hands which can unknowingly do anything - right or wrong. I look at my hand because in this hand I am going to do the next work. Wanting to do good , not bad actions, I ask God to save me. Surrender all actions to the Lord.♥

Photos from Yasodhara Ashram and Geeta's Visit

Geeta and her niece Abhi along with Ashram teacher Swami Saradananda, waiting for the ferry on the way home.

View from the dining hall at the Ashram

For more information about Yasodhara Ashram, go to www.yasodhara.org

In the Midst Of Darkness

Quotes from the Yoga Workshop after the Earthquake

On Sunday, May 25 there was a yoga workshop at The Iyengar Centre to raise money for the Red Cross work in China after the earthquake shook Sichuan. A number of participants asked for copies of the quotations that were read during the workshop. They are printed here.

In the Midst of Darkness
Taken from a passage by Mahatma Gandhi

"I do dimly perceive that whilst everything around me is ever changing, ever dying, there is underlying all that change a living power that is changeless, that holds all together, that creates, dissolves and re-creates.

And is this power benevolent or malevolent? I see it as purely benevolent. For I can see that in the midst of death, light persists; in the midst of untruth, truth persists; in the midst of darkness, light persists. Hence I gather that power is Light, Truth, Light. It is Love. It is the Supreme Good."

American Native Tradition: Sioux Indian Tribal Prayer

"Great Spirit of love, come to me with the power of the North.
Make me courageous when the cold winds of life fall upon me.
Give me strength and endurance for everything
that is harsh, everything that hurts,
everything that makes me squint.
Make me move through life ready to take what comes from the North.

Spirit who comes out of the East,
come to me with the power of the rising sun.
Let there be light in my word.
Let there be light on the path that I walk.
Let me remember always that you give the gift of a new day
Never let me be burdened with sorrow by not starting over.

Great Spirit of creation,
send me the warm and soothing winds from the South.
Comfort me and caress me when I am tired and cold.
Enfold me as your gentle breezes enfold your leaves on the trees.
And as you give to all the earth your warm, moving wind,
Give to me so that I may grow close to you in warmth.

Great life-giving Spirit,
I face the West,
the direction of the sundown.
Let me remember every day that the moment will come when my sun will go down.
Never let me forget that I must fade into you.
Give me beautiful color.
Give me a great sky for setting,
and when it is time to meet you,
I come with glory.

And Giver of all life, I pray to you from the earth,
help me to remember as I touch the earth
that I am little and need your pity.
Help me to be thankful for the gift of the earth
and never to walk hurtfully on the world.
Bless to love what comes from mother earth
and teach me how to love your gifts.

Great Spirit of the heavens,
lift me up to you
that my heart may worship you
and come to you in glory.
Hold in my memory that you are my Creator,
greater than I,
eager for my good life.
Let everything that is in the world
lift my mind,
and my heart,
and my life to you

New Testament, from Corinthians

I will never forget you my people.
I have carved you on the palm of my hand.
I will never forget you;
I will not leave you orphaned.
I will never forget my own.

When I was a child, I spoke as a child,
I understood as a child,
I thought as a child.
But when I became an adult, I put away childish things.

For now, we see through a glass darkly:
But then we shall see face to face.
Now I know only in part,
Then I shall know, even as I am known.

And now faith, hope and love abide,
And the greatest of these is love.

The Bhagavad Gita, chapter 2, verses 13 - 30
What Is Real Never Ceases

The Self dwells in the house of the body,
Which passes through childhood, youth, and old age.
So passes the Self at the time of death
Into another body. The wise know this truth
And are not deceived by it.

When the senses come in contact with sense-objects
They give rise to feelings of heat and cold,
Pleasure and pain, which come and go.
Accept them calmly, as do the wise.

The wise, who live free from pleasure and pain,
Are worthy of immortality.

What is real never ceases to be.
The unreal never is. The sages
Who realize the Self know the secret
Of what is and what is not.

Know that the Self, the ground of existence,
Can never be destroyed or diminished.
For the changeless cannot be changed.

Bodies die, not the Self that dwells therein.
Know the Self to be beyond change and death.
Therefore strive to realize this Self.

Those who look upon the Self as slayer
Or as slain have not realized the Self.
How can the Self be killed or kill
When there is only One?

Never was the Self born; never shall it
Cease to be. Without beginning or end,
Free from birth, free from death, and free from time,
How can the Self die when the body dies?

Who knows the Self to be birthless, deathless,
Not subject to the tyranny of time,
How can the Self slay or cause to be slain?

Even as we cast off worn-out garments
And put on new ones, so casts off the Self
A worn-out body and enters into
Another that is new.

Not pierced by arrows nor burnt by fire,
Affected by neither water nor wind,
The Self is not a physical creature.

Not wounded, not burnt, not wetted, not dried,
The Self is ever and everywhere,
Immovable and everlasting.

The Self cannot be known by the senses,
Nor thought by the mind, nor caught by time.
If you know this, you will not grieve.

Even if you mistake the Self to be
Subject to birth and death, you must not grieve.
For death is certain for those who are born,
As rebirth is certain for those who die.
Why grieve over what cannot be avoided?

We perceive creatures only after birth,
And after they die we perceive them not.
They are manifest only between birth
And death. In this there is no cause for grief.

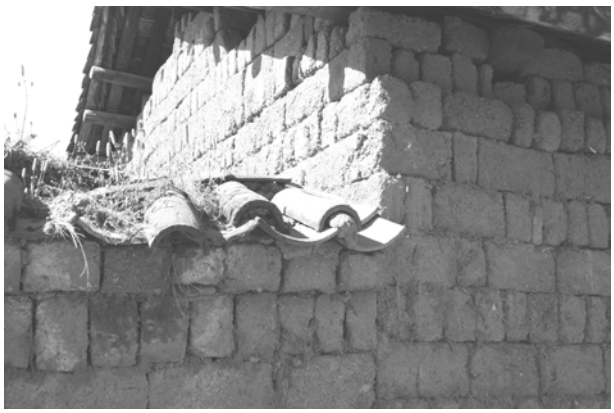
Some there are who have realized the Self
In all its wonder. Others can speak of it
As wonderful. But there are many
Who don't understand even when they hear.

Deathless is the Self in every creature.
Know this truth, and leave all sorrow behind.

Saint Augustine
Entering into Joy, from The Confessions of St. Augustine

Imagine if all the tumult of the body were to quiet down, along with all our busy thoughts about earth, sea, and air;

if the very world should stop, and the mind cease thinking about itself, go beyond itself, and be quite still;



if all the fantasies that appear in dreams and imagination should cease, and there be no speech, no sign.

Imagine if all things that are perishable grew still – for if we listen they are saying, "We did not make ourselves; he made us who abides forever" – imagine, then, that they should say this and fall silent, listening to the very voice of him who made them and not to that of his creation;

so that we should hear not his word through the tongues of men, nor the voice of angels, nor the clouds' thunder, nor any symbol, but the very Self which in these things we love, and go beyond ourselves to attain a flash of that eternal wisdom which abides above all things:

And imagine if that moment were to go on and on, leaving behind all other sights and sounds but this one vision which ravishes and absorbs and fixes the beholder in joy; so that the rest of eternal life were like that moment of illumination which leaves us breathless:

Would this not be what is bidden in scripture, Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord? ♥

The 2002 Karma Yoga Awards

Awarded to Father Joe Periera by *Yoga Journal* Magazine in 2002

“Despite having been born in India, Father Joe Pereira's coming to yoga was somewhat unlikely. For one thing, his Portuguese forebears, although settled in India since the sixteenth century (he was born in 1942 in the former Portuguese colony of Goa), were devoutly Catholic. For another, when as a young man he heard a spiritual calling, it was to the priesthood, and so he spent a decade in seminary and received advanced training before being ordained. But he was also a singer and a lover of music, which led Pereira to attend a performance in Mumbai (Bombay) of the internationally renowned violin virtuoso Yehudi Menuhin—whose own interest in Eastern arts led him to play with sitar maestro Ravi Shankar as well as write the foreword to the B. K. S. Iyengar classic *Light on Yoga*. At the performance, Menuhin introduced Iyengar as "my next violin instructor," piquing the young priest's interest; he soon began taking weekly classes from Iyengar near his Mumbai parish. That was in 1968; by 1971, Father Joe was teaching yoga, and in 1975, he became a certified Iyengar instructor. He incorporated hatha yoga and meditation into his pastoral duties and eventually added a ministry for alcoholics to the parish's services. “

The Vancouver Sun **newspaper did a feature article about Father Joe Pereira in 2007. Following are some excerpts by writer Douglas Todd.**

Building Bridges between Yoga and Catholicism

"Yoga practitioners often dismiss Catholicism as a doctrinaire, uptight, hierarchical religion. Catholics often write off yoga as self-indulgent exercise -- and, at worst, a heretical form of Hindu spirituality that could open practitioners to satanic forces.

Famous in India, the brave man who has spent much of his life trying to ease suspicion and build bridges between these two traditions is Catholic Father Joe Pereira. The remarkable 65-year-old priest from India says the most influential figures in his life -- the teachers who represent "the yin and yang" of his spiritual education -- have been Mother Teresa of Calcutta and India's B.K.S. Iyengar, arguably the world's most influential living yoga master.

In the early 1980s, receiving Mother Teresa's staunch support for the therapeutic powers of yoga, Pereira founded what is now India's largest non-governmental charitable health organization, Kripa (www.kripafoundation.org).

Kripa has grown to 50 institutes throughout India. They are devoted to bringing yoga, spirituality, psychology and other practices to the healing of addicts and the treatment of those struggling with HIV-AIDS.

"Yoga is all about accessing the wisdom of the body," Pereira says. Since Jesus taught that the human body "is a temple of God," the priest says Kripa's goal is to help the suffering realize they have "damaged their temple" and need to "love it back to health."

Since he began to learn yoga almost 40 years ago when he was a young priest undergoing a spiritual crisis and fighting his own addictive tendencies, Pereira describes himself as a "sexual celibate" who's learned through yoga not to deny his sexual energy.

Instead, endlessly energetic Pereira says yoga teaches him to "sublimate" his sexual energy and "use it for healthy living." Despite his bold beliefs and actions, Pereira has managed to maintain strong backing for his work from key Catholic leaders in India, including Mumbai's Cardinal Ivan Dias, who was in 2006 appointed prefect of the Vatican's Congregation for the Evangelization of People.

Calling yoga a "spiritual practice" rather than a religion, Pereira believes it dovetails with Christianity and other faiths because it aims to access the spirit of God that resides in all people".

Hindus might call this spirit the Self, or atman, Pereira says. Like Christians who believe God is incarnate in people, Hindus similarly believe the Self is, at the mystical level, the same as God, or Brahman.

The priest says it's only through deep relaxation, which comes through yoga, meditation and related spiritual practices, that humans can calm their anxious minds and open to the presence of God.♥

The teaching dilemma

By Angela Tam

What is Yoga? Is it a discipline or a product?

The answer may seem obvious, but it's not.

Historically Yoga was a discipline practised only by a few devoted aspirants determined to seek union with the divine. It was imperative that the practitioner respected the guru. Even when B K S Iyengar brought his style of hatha yoga to the West, discipline was still very much at the core of the practice, just as it was for any form of learning in those days. He assumed a stern manner in order to maintain a distance between himself and his female students – in fact, so successful was he in making discipline an integral part of his teaching that some of his students were subsequently known to teach what was described – by a long-time practitioner and husband of an Iyengar teacher no less – as "boot camp".

But then hatha yoga underwent a subtle change: it was embraced by the fitness industry in the 1980s and found itself attracting, not spiritual seekers, but a generation of fitness enthusiasts who, instead of ponderous issues like the Korea or Vietnam War, has grown up immersed in nothing more serious than the battle for market share between Nike and Reebok.

Today, the supremacy of the marketplace is such that even schools and universities have to organise their own "fashion parades", whether they're education fairs designed to attract prospective students or carefully crafted proposals designed to attract research funding. This is an age in which parents and students take teachers to task for their own failures, as in "I pay for this course; how dare you give me a bad grade?"

As a result of this, yoga is more often considered a product than a discipline, even though the latter term remains in common usage. So here's a dilemma: a yoga teacher can tell a student off for being late or failing to switch off her mobile phone, but can a yoga 'instructor' do that to her 'customer'?

Is it possible to maintain the integrity of one's teaching without being too rigid? Is there some kind of middle way that would allow a teacher to cope with this change?

Interestingly the fitness industry, always on the lookout for new ways to keep its clientele coming back for more, has hit on the idea of boot camps, so perhaps there is hope. Besides, even when the average polytechnic has to be indulgent and nice, the Harvards and Oxfords of academia can still afford to be strict by virtue of their vaunted reputation.

Alas, in markets where the practitioners are more likely to judge the quality of a studio by its décor than its teaching, this remains a challenge. ♥

Upcoming Events

Registration is Open for:
Father Joe Pereira Yoga Workshop
July 11 – 15

Weekend Workshop Schedule: Yoga An Inward Journey of Healing

Friday, July 11	10:00am – 1:00pm –All Level Yoga Intensive
	4:00 – 6:00pm - Pranayama
Saturday, July 12	10:00 – 1:00pm – All Level Yoga Intensive
	4:00 – 6:00pm - Pranayama
Sunday, July 13	10:00 – 1:00pm – All Level Yoga Intensive
	4:00 – 6:00pm - Pranayama

Morning sessions $600 each. Afternoon sessions $500

Monday & Tuesday Schedule: Rehabilitation & Re-scripting Broken Lives

Monday , July 14	10:00 – 1:00pm Restorative Yoga for People with Ailments
	7:00 – 9:00pm Talk on Yoga for Healing Addictions and HIV AIDS
Tuesday, July 15	10:00 – 1:00pm Restorative Yoga For People with Ailments
	7:00 – 9:00pm Yoga and Meditation (all faiths)

Morning Classes $600, Evening sessions $500.

To Register: e mail info@iyengaryogahongkong.com. Post payment by cheque to The Iyengar Yoga Centre of Hong Kong, Room 406 New Victory House, 93 – 103 Wing Lok St., Sheung Wan. 2541 0401
www.iyengaryogahongkong.com

Summer Yoga Pass
Only $1800 for three months unlimited classes
June 1 – August 31. Purchase at the Desk.

The Iyengar Yoga Centre of Hong Kong operates according to the guidelines set out by BKS Iyengar. We are recognized as an authentic Iyengar teaching centre and are listed internationally as part of that organization. Teachers have Iyengar Certification or are engaged in a three-year program that leads to certification.
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