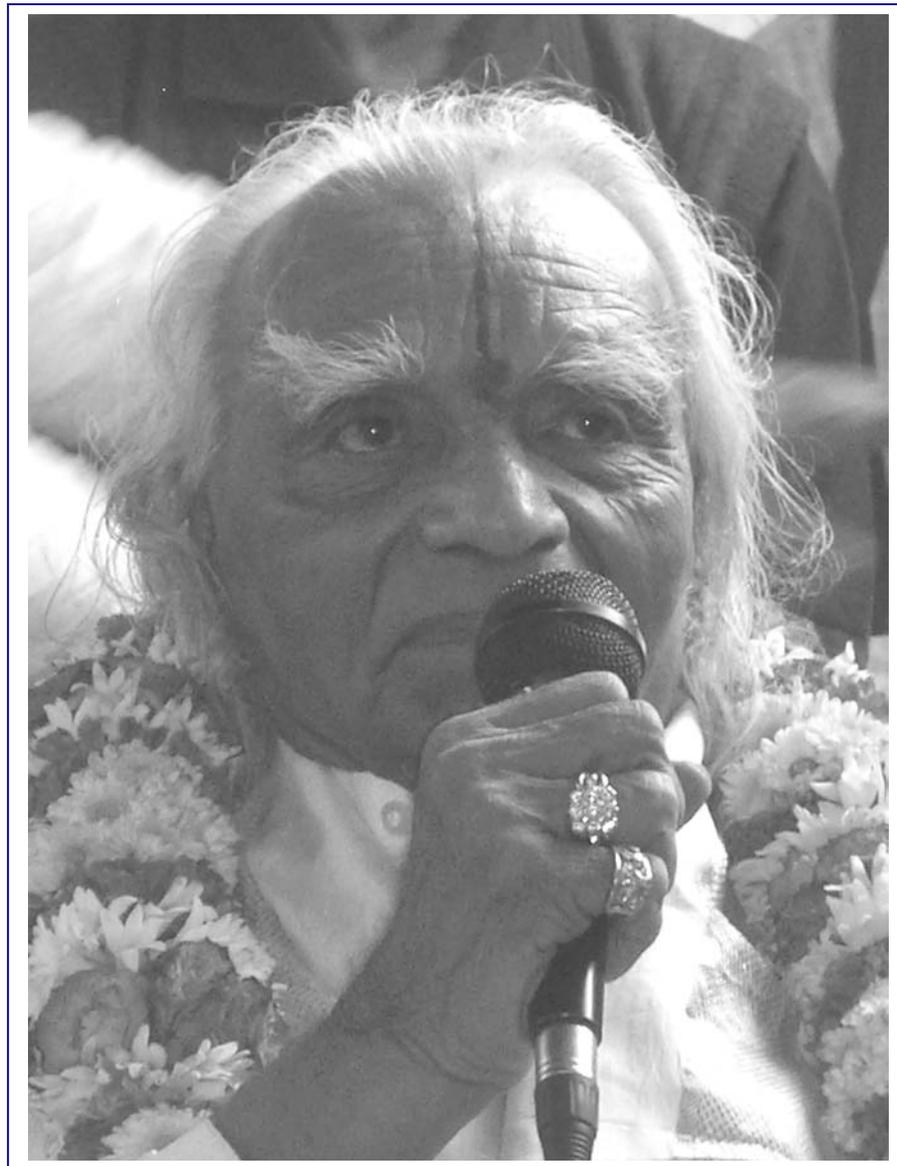




SVADHYAYA

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A Newsletter from The Iyengar Yoga Centre of Hong Kong January 2009



“The essence of yoga is to integrate the body with the mind and the mind with Self.”

B.K.S.Iyengar at 90



By Linda Shevloff

The main feature of this issue of Svadhyaya is the 90th birthday celebration for Gururji BKS Iyengar. Two of the teachers from our studio attended these celebrations in Pune, India during the month of December. George Dovas and Ursula Moser were there. George recorded some of the talks and he took quite a few photos. His has kindly transcribed the talk that Gururji gave at the village of Bellur.

Bellur is the place where Gururji was born and where he has in later life been funding school, hospital and community projects. On the days immediately after his birthday party in Pune he invited his students to go to the south Indian village of Bellur with him to visit the community. As the talk has many references to the Yoga Sutras in Sanskrit, we have included a translation of these Sutras into English so that readers can understand the meaning better. You will find these squeezed in on page 8.

There are three other articles in this issue that are “reflections”. George has reflected on the events of the birthday and he summarizes for himself some of the things he learned. In the other article, Shirley Daventry French reflects on the turmoil in the world. She remembers her mother who thought that the modern world is an awful place, and she concludes that the world has likely always been an awful place. Yoga is a valuable tool that helps us on our journey through life. Shirley’s article was written a few years ago, but it is timely in that there seems to be such trouble in the world

just now. A third reflection is by one of the current teacher trainees at our Iyengar Yoga Centre, Andrew Horner, who wrote about a particular yoga sutra, giving it thoughtful consideration. Also included in this issue is an interview with Mr. Iyengar about Iyengar yoga, emphasizing the importance of reflection in this yoga practice.

Yoga teacher trainees at our studio use the practice of “reflection”. During the three years of their training program they are given a monthly assignment to write. It will usually be based on a book they have been asked to read or on a workshop they have attended. In their written papers they address the content of what they have learned in a factual way, but they also will be asked to think about and comment on how this applies to their lives.

We are always attempting to internalize our studies to make them truly meaningful. In fact the name of this newsletter, “Svadhyaya” means both study of the self and study of the scriptures. It is one of the acts of yoga that leads us to our inner self. In the Yoga Sutras, Patanjali says: “*tapah Svadhyaya Isvarapranidhanani kriyayogah*” (Sutra II. 1) “Burning zeal in practice, self study and surrender to God are the acts of yoga”.

One of my yoga teachers really emphasized the importance of reflection in life. She was Swami Sivananda Radha. She was not an Iyengar Yogi, but her strict teaching about really penetrating ourselves and really looking honestly at ourselves was very similar to the method that uses Gururji when he makes us look at our alignment and our balance to discover internal truth. Swami Radha taught that we can reflect on any moment in our life and find inner truth. Students of hers learned to reflect on dreams, on thoughts, on their emotions, on reactions, virtually on everything. In the same way we can reflect on yoga poses, our strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes...the process is endless.

This newsletter comes out just a few days before I leave for India to have a month of study and reflection at The Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute in Pune. I must say that I look forward to a time that will surely be rich. ♥

A Talk Given By BKS Iyengar During his 90th Birthday Celebrations at Bellur

Hong Kong Iyengar teacher George Dovas, attended the birthday celebrations for Guruji BKS Iyengar in India last month. On December 17, in the village of Bellur, where he was born, Guruji talked to a gathering of well wishers. He had invited birthday guests to travel to the village of Bellur with him to see the projects in the schools, hospital and community that he has started. Preceding this talk, an Indian Swami named Parampujya Jagadguru Sri Sri Jayendrapuri Mahaswamiji spoke. George recorded and transcribed his talk, which is re-printed here.

Fellow travellers in yoga and fellow travellers in search of knowledge.

Having heard the talk from Swamiji which was like nectar, my speech will be slightly opposite.

He has given you a gem of the life force which you all have to make use of it so that you all live as true human beings in this universe. As you are called humans, man.”Maanava”, means honour, respect. So let us all live together with honour and dignity so that the whole world will see peace, not pieces, but let us have that peace. Our minds are in pieces, our intelligence are in pieces, so let us join these pieces, all the pieces together and make them through yoga so that there is an eternal blissful peace in the world.

Swamiji gave the clue of the self where he said, “I am not the body, I am not the mind, I am not the intellect, I am not the consciousness, I am not the water, earth, ether, fire, air. But according to Patanjali, they are all there *for the self to be utilised* by the self, for the self to experience the eternal [pause] joy, the eternal bliss.

Patanjali says “*drastrdsyayoh samyogah heyahetuh*”

The connection between, the communication between, the nature and the soul cause lots of problems, lots of intricacies in ones life. Maybe in the form of fluctuations, modulations or in the form of sorrows, pains or in the form of diseases. But at the same time he says how to use these elements, though we are not drawn into that, how we are to use these elements for the sake of experiencing the atma darshana.

“*sva svamisaktyoh svarupopalabdhi hetuh samyogah*”

The “sva” is all this nature and its elements including the ego, the intelligence, the citta, but swami is the Lord who is untouched, untainted, unalloyed. How the “sva”, the elements of nature has to help the self, the swami, so that the swami becomes pure and clean and sanctifies the nature so that it enjoys the oneness, without any difference between body, mind, intellect, ego or the soul.

The effect of asana, many people say asana is a physical exercise which is *completely* the cheat in the world.

tatah dvandvah anabhighatah”

Patanjali has beautifully explained that the dualities. When they say of the dualities they speak of honour, dishonour, heat, cold, but actually the “dvandvah” means there is a battlefield going on between each individual, between nature, between the imposter the ego, and the soul which is pure. So Patanjali explains that the head that is considered as the “krukshetra” and the heart is considered as “dharma kshetra”. Yoga is the subject which communicates the “krukshetra”, the intelligence of the head with the “dharma kshetra”, the intelligence of the heart.

That is why the sutra says “Sva svamisaktyoh svarupopalabdhī hetuh samyogah yogah.”. So this is the effect of yoga, “tatah dvandvah anabhighatah”. The effect of the asanas is to nullify the charges of the battery of nature, not to act but to neutralise by the practice of asanas so that there is a space, a pause, created between the body which is connected to the five elements and the five tanmatras, manas, buddhi, ahmkara and on the other side pure self, sva.

So creating pause in between means the nature is also sublime, the self is also sublime and when that sublimation takes place, you have mastered the asana that is the main effect of the asana “tatah dvandvah anabhighatah”. So the dualities in the elements of nature there itself and the self is vanquished. For that he said that you have to struggle: “prayatna saithilya ananta samapattibhyam”

The moment the effortful effort, becomes an effortless effort, infinity is felt in you because the body, the mind, the intelligence, and the consciousness coordinates with the self and they go, like Swamiji said, like the Ganga and Jamuna joining together, becoming one river. Here the nature or the principles of nature and self become one, and they flow together, and that is what the asana is going to give you. If Mahatma Gandhi could win independence by two leaves of yoga; ahimsa, and satya (Harischandra by satya, Sibi by aparigraha, Bhisma by brahmacarya), do you mean to say that one cannot reach the highest level by the practice of asanas? If the asanas are physical, then I say even Mahatma Gandhi when he followed yama, niyama, could have said this is only for the social benefit of social exploitation.

But believe that in yoga each and every leaf will take you to the zenith of yoga.

Friends, you are all kind enough to hear, quietly without making any disturbance. You are so silent, I am grateful to all of you, and before concluding, I have to, not only me but the sons of Bellur and the surrounding children of Bellur, I have to, through them, I’m expressing my gratitude for all of you who have assembled here, making this Bellur an educational health centre so that the children benefit. If the children are healthy I am sure that the wealth of the nation progresses.

If a tree is cut it will become dry very soon, but a sapling can be twisted and turned according to the will of the development. As Swamiji said, you need “ iccha” willpower, so you can tune children through the willpower of the teachers so that they are trim to grow as the healthy children. You are part and parcel in helping this school and hospital so that not only children get educated but children also gain health, and as soon and as long as health and education are concerned, they are the foundations of the growth of the children in order to move towards the spiritual life. As long as there is no education or there is no health they cannot even think of soul or God. Therefore I thought that this is the best way to present to the world that the children who are poorest of the poor, lowest of the low are educated, and brought up so that my mother land grows as it was in the early days, as Swamiji said like rishis and sages of the yore.

I want that to come and I'm grateful to my cultured students who donated graciously, generously for the success of this work. For me God is personal. God cannot be seen but he can be felt. You have the back, that you cannot see, but you can feel, so similarly as the back cannot be seen, God cannot be seen. He can be felt as you feel your back . So yoga teaches, when you are practicing, let your intelligence, let your senses of perception move towards the back, so that one day you reach the interior door of the soul, sanctum sanctorum so that you're all the body, the mind, and soul that surrenders into the cave of the self and for that I have started this work. This is just a seed, I hope, one day this grows into a gigantic tree and the children who passed through become students of spiritual knowledge also.

I thank you on behalf of all the students of Bellur and the surrounding villages. The merit and credit of the success goes to you and you have to accept it♥.



Above Left: Children at the school in Bellur, funded by Guruji .

Above Right: A room at the hospital in Bellur , built through his trust fund

Below Right: Guruji's childhood home in Bellur



“Moulding Manking for 9 Decades”

Reflections by George Dovas

“Moulding Manking for 9 Decades” – This was the message that decorated the walls of the Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Institute in December 2008. Mr. Iyengar’s students had lovingly placed these words on the wall to mark the occasion of Mr Iyengar’s ninety first birth day anniversary (in other words, he is 90 years old). Students, including myself, had travelled to Pune from all around the world to participate in the celebrations.

The 90th birthday of BKS Iyengar was celebrated with a five day programme of events in Pune encompassing Hindu tradition, ritual, cultural events and spiritual discourses. In addition to the celebrations which were in Pune, students accompanied Guruji on a four day cultural tour which included a visit to Bellur, Guruji’s birthplace.

Celebrations commenced on Wednesday, 10th December with a puja (a hindu religious ceremony). This was the day of Guruji’s birthday according to the Indian calendar, which is lunar based, and so his birth date by the Indian calendar changes every year (like the date for Chinese New Year changes every year). According to the western calendar, his birthday is on the 14th December.

The puja, held at Govinda Gardens was organised by his family and a personal invitation had been extended to all of Guruji’s students so that we could attend and witness the ceremony.

The puja got underway at 7:30am with chanting conducted by hindu priests, which continued for much of the ceremony and included verses from the Upanishads. A homa made up part of the ceremony. A homa is a ritual that involves making offerings into a consecrated fire. Guruji also received a ritual bathing with holy water. During the bathing, Guruji sat on a chair surrounded by the priests. Some of the priests held a pieced of cloth over his head, whilst other poured sacred water through the cloth and all over him. The water was poured from a large number of pots that contained water from different sacred places in India, one of which was the Ganges River. This was followed by Guruji being weighed on a set of giant scales. Guruji set on one side of the scales whilst the other side of the scales were loaded with jaggery (sugar) and grains to equal (or perpahs outweigh) his weight. The jaggery and grains would be, later, given as offerings to Patanjali during the visit to the Patanjali temple in Bellur.

At the puja, both breakfast and lunch were catered by the family. Lunch, which was given as prasad, was a south indian thali prepared by the priests and served on a banana leaf.

Later that evening, Guruji inaugurated an exhibition that was put together by a group of his students. The exhibition included photographs of Guruji from different periods of his life, along with written text including key sutras from the Yoga sutras of Patanjali. There was also video of Guruji’s practice including some recently shot video of his pranayama practice. A number of different props that have been developed for use in the practice of yoga by Guruji were also on display.

On **Thursday, 11th December**, Geeta Iyengar conducted a lecture on the Bhagavad Gita. This was not an official part of the birthday celebrations, but part of a monthly custom at the Institute where a talk is given or a video is shown to the students. In her talk, Geeta reminded us of the Bhagavad Gita’s message to have faith in the Lord, not asking when our problems will be solved, but knowing that everything that happens has a reason behind it.

She addressed a common question that comes from students who ask that, “if the Lord is within us, next to us and around us, why is there such a gap between us and Him?”

The answer is that nature (prakrti) stands between us. Nature makes us go according to nature. Nature is ageing us; nature makes us hungry, thirsty; it makes us need to go to the toilet. Furthermore we have our own attachments and aversions. We follow yoga to cleanse this.

Geeta said, like a cooking vessel that you use everyday, you clean it after each use so it’s ready to use again the next day. In a similar way, we need to use yoga to cleanse our body and senses daily in order to tackle the challenges of the new day with a “clean” body.

Later on Thursday evening, students gathered at Yashwantrao Chavan Natya Griha auditorium, to attend the premiere of the film, *Leap of Faith*.

“The film spans 9 decades of Guruji Yogacharya BKS Iyengar’s life and over 70 years of his practice and teachings.”.....“It shows him as a Guru, a Teacher, a Husband, a Father and a Shishya – a multifaceted personality.”

“*Leap of Faith* is a documentation of Guruji’s journey and how he overcame the trials and tribulations in life with yoga. The film discerns how Guruji explored the realm and depth of this subject from the physical nuances to the spiritual heights that he has attained.”

Following the screening of this film, the internationally renowned flautist, Pandit Hari Prasad charmed us with the enchanting sounds of the Bansuri flute (a flute made from a single piece of bamboo).

On the next day, **Friday, 12th December**, students were enlightened by a lecture, demonstration and dance recital by Ms Mandakini Trivedi. In her lecture, Ms Mandakini Trivedi unveiled the parallels between classical Indian dance and yogic philosophy. Students in the audience were truly fascinated to discover the hidden meaning behind Indian classical dance. The following was written in the programme guide for this event:

“Concealed beneath the rich and intricate fabric of Classical Indian Dance, lays a system of mind – body discipline that is aesthetic, symbolic and yogic. Its themes, steeped in mythology, contain wisdom that is relevant even in our times. Indian Dance is a complete yoga. All aspects of yoga – from the perfection of the mind and body to the reaching of a Perfected State – find an expression in classical Indian dance.”

On the same day, Naseeruddin Shah, a well known actor from India (who has performed in Hollywood movies) brought Khalil Gibran’s book, “The Prophet”, to life. Accompanied by a small cast of actors and actresses, the 26 poetic essays in the book came alive on stage. The presentation had the audience captivated and listening intently to the sagacious truths that were being espoused in the drama.

From the programme: “The play is not a drama but a vision of the spiritual, emotional and mundane life of human beings. It contains the eternal truth of the Upanishads, the wisdom of Socrates and the poetic of Tagore. The play reveals the authors vast mystic vision, floating human forms over the tranquil sea enveloped in mist. As the director states, “The prophet is about the ordinariness of the plains of existence.””

After a small intermission, “The Power of Innocence”, a yoga demonstration by children charmed the audience. Guruji had once said: “Yoga is like music; the rhythm of the body, the melody of the mind and the harmony of the soul, create the symphony of life” The students’ goal was to make this statement from Guruji come to life, and they did so. Students were from various Iyengar Yoga classes in Mumbai including special schools for learning disabilities.

As well as rich presentation of asanas, students gave a small presentation highlighting what they learnt through the practice of the asanas. They talked about how the different asanas “have developed a variety of characteristics in them such as discipline, precision, stability, focus and concentration, determination, the ability to dream and the courage to turn them into reality, the ability to control anger, calmness, resilience, unwavering attention, stamina, endurance and above all humility.”

On **Sunday, 14th December**, the day of Guruji’s birthday, hundreds of students came together at Govinda Gardens to felicitate Guruji on the occasion of his birthday and also to seek his blessings.

As Guruji entered the gardens that were decorated with lights and a decorative backdrop, the students, estimated to be 1,000 in number, chanted and offered their namaskar to Guruji. The evening included speeches from long time students of Gurujis, including Faeq Biria from France, Manouso Manos from U.S.A., Padma from South Africa, Prashantaji and Geetaji. When Guruji spoke, we were all touched to hear him refer to us as his children. He said that even though he had attained detachment from material possessions, he was attached to us. He told us that he has given us a gift and we were to polish it and let it shine.

After this formal programme of events in Pune, we went on a tour with Guruji starting in Bangalore and visiting such places as Bellur (Mr Iyengar’s birthplace), Mysore and Halebidu.

On the first day, we spent the day in Bellur, the village that Mr Iyengar was born in. Bellur is a rural village in the state of Karnataka in South India. The locals from Bellur and surrounding villages had gathered to welcome us to their village. A red carpet, strewn with fresh marigolds and other fragrant flowers that must have run for some 40 metres or so ran from the village entrance to the Patanjali temple. We all thought this was exclusively for Mr Iyengar, but later some said it was for all the visitors to the village. A puja was conducted at the temple, before we explored the school, hospital and community housing that had been built from the generous donations by Iyengar Yoga students from around the world.

The next couple of days included visits to temples, memorable lunches and dinners amongst scenic locations of South India. One evening, we were entertained (and awakened from our tired and dreary states) by a group of performing drummers. During this show there was a pair of men who performed what looked like impossible feats of balance and concentration.

The tour involved many hours of travelling on busses and some very long days. Some of us whispered to each other how remarkable it was that Mr. Iyengar’s energy never seemed to wain, whilst our energy was sapped by the end of each day.

Personally, my own participation in the ceremonies, speeches and rituals that made up these celebrations allowed me to develop a deeper understanding of my own relationship with Iyengar Yoga and the man behind the teachings who many of us refer to as “Guruji”. I developed a better understanding of the meaning, significance and gravity of the word “guru” and why I refer to Mr. Iyengar as “Guruji”♥.

References to the Yoga Sutras in Guruji’s Talk from Bellur article on Pages 3-5.

II.17 drastrdrsyayoh samyogah heyahetuh

“The cause of pain is the association or identification of the seer (ātma) with the seen (prakrti) and the remedy lies in their dissociation.”

II.23 sva svamisaktyoh svarupopalabdhi hetuh samyogah

“The conjunction of the seer with the seen is for the seer to discover his own true nature.”

II.47 prayatna saithilya ananta samapattibhyam

“Perfection in an āsana is achieved when the effort to perform it becomes effortless and the infinite being within is reached.”

II 48 tatah dvandvah anabhighatah

“From then on, the sadhaka is undisturbed by dualities.”

Guruji on “Iyengar Yoga”

This interview with B.K.S. Iyengar appeared in *Yoga Rahasaya*, Volume 15, No.2, 2008. The interview was done in 2005, just after the publication of *Light on Life*. He is interviewed by the publishing agent Stephanie Tade. Reprinted with permission from *Yoga Rahasaya*.

For those who are not familiar with your style of yoga teaching, in what ways is it different than other types of practice?



The yogic principles remain the same but styles may differ. As the tree has one trunk but many branches, yoga is one but its adaptation may vary. The source is the trunk of yoga. Whatever the style of yoga may be, one experiences a transformation in one's life style. My way of practice is not different to others except in the alignment of the motor nerves with the sensory nerves. This needs intellectual reflection and skilful actions without distorting even the minutest part of the anatomical structure of the body, so that the bones, the joints, the muscles, the fibers, the energy, the mind and the intelligence are made to function simultaneously with balance and harmony so that the life force as well as the core touches all the concerned layers of the body.

What is the importance of precision and alignment within Iyengar yoga?

My friend, alignment leads to precision and precision is a divine state where one experiences the cosmic force mingling with the individual force. In short, precision is the meeting place of the individual soul with the Universal Soul.

What are the benefits of holding poses for longer periods of time?

Yoga practices have both motion and action. Motion is a movement from one position to another position sequentially to reach the final position and to return back to the starting point which is commonly known as vinyasa karma. In motion, the outer mind is active, whereas if one holds the asana for a longer period of time, the outer mind is automatically made to move to touch the inner mind, and through that inner mind, one is made to reach the consciousness and the Self.

Long stay in an asana makes the intelligence and consciousness develop patience, perseverance and forbearance. It also helps to judge each asana judiciously to get the right position of the asana and to experience firmness and quietness in it.

Secondly, holding the asana for a long time helps the mind and intelligence to penetrate the unknown or unrecognizable parts of the interior body. Penetration involves active attention with action, dynamic awareness and finesse adjustments for precise position.

Lasly, staying in asana helps in building enduring power in the nervous system as it builds up mental and intellectual courage, vigour, confidence and faith to get established in the Sadhana. The practitioner becomes a “man of nerves” – is this a small benefit?

The use of props – pillows, blankets, belts or blocks- is central to your teaching of asanas. Why is this? Can you describe their function, whether physical, spiritual or both?



The use of props, pillows, blankets, blocks or belts is not central in my practice or teaching as an alternative method of mastering the asana. As true teachers are rare, I evolved these props to guide the doers to get the right sense of direction while performing the asana, as the props do not allow mistakes to happen and the practitioners can't go wrong in their practice. Props are self-help and self-guides for self-practice.

Secondly, those who are mentally confused, physically stiff and shaky or have disabilities cannot perform the asanas independently. As the hospitals have Intensive Care Units which monitor body functions, these props monitor the body of the practitioners by not allowing wrong practices to occur so that the practitioner experiences a sense of well being, comfort and confidence.

Thirdly, these props do two things at the same time. They help to extend and expand the muscles, joints and organs of the body and lead one to relax the mind to look within with comfort, which is a key toward meditation.

As the props guide the body in the right direction, the feeling of well-being is felt in the body, and the mind experiences elation and freshness. This experience of well-being and freshness in the mind naturally takes one to experience equipoise and oneness in body, mind and self.

Do people benefit from yoga, no matter where their mind is?



Those who do not activate their muscles as they should be activated do feel a sense of well-being through the yogic movements. First, one derives the benefit of lightness in the limbs of the body or freshness in the mind, even if their mind is not in yoga. Yoga brings the attention of the mind to focus on correct alignment of the body with the mind and the mind with the intelligence. Practice of yoga is not possible without this attention and reflection of the mind. The essence of yoga is to integrate the body with the mind and the mind with Self. It may take time to attain this.

Please note that the benefit of yoga is derived according to one's frame of mind. If one practices casually it gives only casual results and intense practice brings intense benefits. ♥



REFLECTIONS

An excerpt from a longer article by Shirley Daventry French in The Newsletter of the Iyengar Yoga Centre of Victoria, Canada, October 2007. Re-printed with permission.



Many Hong Kong students know Shirley from her many teaching visits to our Iyengar Yoga Centre. Shirley's regularly published articles often begin with comment on happenings in the wider world that lead her to ponder their deeper meanings

Mistaking the transient for the permanent, the impure for the pure, pain for pleasure, and that which is not the self for the self: all this is called lack of spiritual knowledge, avidya.

- B.K.S. Iyengar, *Light on Patanjali's Yoga Sutras*; II-5

When my mother was still alive and in her eighties, she would often say that she was glad that she was not young in "this awful world" which she contrasted unfavourably with the world in which she had lived most of her life. I would marvel at this, because this was a woman who was born during the Boer War, came of age in the First World War in which her brothers and my father whom she had just met all fought at the front. One brother was killed and two gassed in France. My father, serving in Palestine, had some close calls but came through unscathed physically. After the war they married and had children just as the world economy collapsed and gave rise to the Great Depression. They were rescued from this only by the Second World War during which her husband was once again on active service, this time along with her son. For good measure, in this war she was bombed along with her elderly mother and young daughter for the best part of six years!

When has it ever been other than "an awful world"? I often wonder about the human race with its propensity toward cruelty, and reading history does nothing to reassure me unless I look beyond the external to the indomitable human spirit which arises in the midst of the most terrible adversity. Where does this come from? How can I foster that in myself? For interesting reading on this topic, I recommend Victor Frankl's book *Man's Search for Meaning*. Swami Vivikananda also has interesting things to say about this in his discourse on Raja Yoga. He asks the question: "Why should we be unselfish? Where is the necessity, the force, the power, that compels me to be unselfish?" He posits that from a purely rational position there is no reason for this. We don't act in unselfish ways because people tell us that we should. Why would anyone ever lay down their life for another? It is beyond reason, and this is where the practice of yoga takes us, towards knowledge of a higher existence.

Each generation comes of age to face its own struggle. The world, it seems, is not meant to be a comfortable place. It is always in turmoil, and to think otherwise is an illusion.

All that has changed lately is that current world events have brought its instability into sharp focus, particularly in North America. Life here on earth is transient. To pretend otherwise is a delusion, one of which many people attempt to perpetuate until the end of their lives. As the writer William Saroyan said on his deathbed: “Everybody has got to die, but I always believed an exception would be made in my case.”

In Sutra II-3, Patanjali cites five *klesas* or afflictions which disturb the equilibrium of consciousness. One of them is *abhinivesah* or clinging to life. The others are *avidya* (ignorance), *asmita* (egoism), *raga* (attraction), and *dvesa* (repulsion). *Avidya* or ignorance, so he says, is the source of all the others.

Years ago I saw a film, made by the BBC where the South African author Laurens Van der Post was talking to Carl Jung towards the end of Jung’s life. In fact, he died a few weeks after the film was made. There is a moment imprinted on my memory where Van der Post asks Jung if he believes in God. Jung pauses before answering and a beatific smile appears transforms his face as he looks up, shaking his head gently from side to side, and says, “No! No! I don’t believe.” After another pause he looks up and says, “*I know.*” At that moment I knew he knew, and hoped that by the time I reached the end of my life I would be able to say that with the same conviction as Jung.

It is no accident that the pose which ends our yoga practice is called *savasana*, corpse pose. Unless we come to terms with our own mortality, we cannot live a full life. How many people when sick unto death are still talking about “when I get better”? How many people faced with a life threatening illness are so busy reassuring themselves that they are going to beat it that they are unable to focus on the current threat and how to approach that? Swami Radha used to say that when someone suffering from a critical illness came to her for spiritual counseling, she asked them to review their life and ask it should be spared and what changes they would be prepared to make if it were. At the same time they must face the possibility of death, perhaps sooner than later. When sick or in any crisis, first we have to be fully in the present moment. This is what crisis teach us – immediacy.

One of the primary choices we have to make is to live life as a warrior, not courting danger but not hiding from it either; or as a wimp, trying to play it safe, which is never successful. Clinging to life only devalues it; eventually our grip is prised loose.

Sometimes in the midst of a crisis, it is possible to see incidents or signs pointing toward this crisis which we have ignored. If our ignorance prevented us from foresight, at least with hindsight we can reflect on what happened and learn – ignorant no longer.

The primary purpose of the practice of yoga is to remove our ignorance. It is from ignorance that we identify with our body and its appearance, our mind and its achievements, our job, our status in society, our roles in the family and all the external paraphernalia we acquire in life on earth. All of this is fleeting. While we need our body to journey through this life, it is not who we really are. Neither is the mind. We are just confused about that. In the words of a vedic prayer, we confuse the unreal for the real, darkness for light, and death for immortality. Until this transformation is complete, while even a vestige of ignorance remains, we need to keep practicing. For this practice we require the body and the mind. When we practice with a spirit of devotion, with sincerity and humility, the body and mind become spiritual tools. For this purpose they are invaluable and, like all tools, must be treated with care and respect so that they last as long as we have need of them. ♥

Yoga Sutras 1st Chapter: Concentration on the Divine

Paper #9, June 2008

By Andrew Horner

Have you heard the story of the man who was having trouble connecting with the Divine? In frustration, he describes the problem to his guru, who asks him what he holds most dear – what he thinks about most. The man replies that he likes to think about his cow – his sole source of income and dearest companion. So, the guru tells him to try meditating on his cow, as a manifestation of the Divine. After several days, the guru visits the man to see how things are going. When he knocks at the door, the man shouts from inside: “Go away! I’m busy meditating.” The guru asks him to come out for further instructions, especially on the importance of moderation. The man shouts: “I can’t come out. My horns are too big to fit through the door.”

The message of the story, which was told by the 19th century mystic Ramakrishna, is that we gradually become what we think about most, and hold most dear. Over time and with practice, we gradually become our Divine ideal. The Russian writer Chekov tells us that we are what we believe. The deep faith in our hearts determines who we are.

Ramakrishna’s story is an example of the verses found in the *Yoga Sutras*, which say:

Concentration may be attained by fixing the mind upon a single truth. It can also be attained by meditating on the heart of an illumined soul that is free from passion, or by fixing the mind upon any divine form or symbol that appeals to one as good.

This is an amazingly universal outlook, and allows a lot of individual freedom. But more freedom also brings more responsibility. Instead of giving a fixed ideal, we have to choose and cultivate our own highest ideal, our own conception of the Divine.

Mahatma Gandhi took these verses of the *Yoga Sutras* to heart, and practiced them. He even sounds like the guru of the man with the cow when he says:

True meditation consists in closing the eyes and ears of the mind to all else except the object of one’s devotion. Man’s conception of God is naturally limited. Each one has, therefore, to think of God as best appears to him, provided that the conception is pure and uplifting.

What Gandhi, Ramakrishna, and the *Yoga Sutras* are saying is that any divine form is holy if we approach it with sincerity. Even if our chosen image is simple and childish, even if others don’t like it – even if it’s a cow – it doesn’t matter. What’s important is our attitude towards it. If we worship it with sincerity and reverence, we make it sacred. The Gita expresses the same idea when Krishna says: “*In whatever form people worship me, so I receive them; all paths lead to me*” – meaning, all paths lead to one and the same Divine.

It's important that the ideal should be appealing and attractive so that we can take it deep into our hearts. In the business of everyday life, it's easy to forget about ideals unless they have a place deep in our hearts. In the Hindu tradition, it's common for people to repeat the Holy Name, or mantram, silently in the mind in the midst of daily activities. The mantram symbolizes the Divine. Eastern Orthodox Christianity also has this tradition. Sometimes the name is louder and more in the foreground of the mind; other times it might recede to the background or be forgotten about.

There's another great story told by Ramakrishna about a group of pilgrims in the Himalayas. While walking along their minds pleasantly drift back and forth between the pleasures of the past and the hoped-for profits of the future. The Sanskrit language has a word, *kama*, which means both pleasure and profit. While dwelling on *kama*, the pilgrims come to a deep gorge spanned by an old rope suspension bridge. As they cross the gorge, swaying dangerously from side to side, suddenly with all their might they repeat RAMA, RAMA, RAMA – the Hindu Holy Name. While on that bridge, they repeat the mantram with the intensity of a great sage. But as soon as they reach the other side, RAMA, RAMA, RAMA becomes KAMA, KAMA, KAMA – PLEASURE, PROFIT, PLEASURE, PROFIT. They go right back to their usual wandering memories and desires.

So, how do we become established in the Divine? How do we practice for those desperate situations when we or a loved one is suffering intensely?

In Iyengar yoga, asana and pranayama are the ways that we “meditate on our cow.” They gradually train our concentration so that we can keep a steady mind wherever we are, whatever we are doing. They train our mind so that it cannot be swept away by an impulsive desire or fear; so that it cannot be haunted by an unpleasant memory or anxiety about the future. In this practice, the asana serves as a mantram. It represents the Divine – invoked again and again in asana practice. The pranayama breath also serves the same purpose. After years of practice, we're told, our every movement, our every breath – both in yoga and in daily life – becomes charged with the Divine. And in this way, our awareness of the Divine within us gradually comes to life. ♥



Birthday Cake at the Iyengar Yoga Centre of Hong Kong

Ursula Moser and George Dovas at the Birthday Celebrations in Pune



GEMS FROM INDIA

Sunday, 1st March 2009

3:00pm-5:00pm Asana Workshop \$300

5:15pm - 6:30pm “Leap Of Faith” film screening Free

It is my pleasure to share with you some of my experiences from my studies at the Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Institute during the months of November and December 2008.

These insights from India will help to transform your poses, bringing life and vibrancy to them.

Teachings came in different forms and in unexpected places – they came in the asana classes, during the practice time and from the talks given by the BKS Iyengar, Geeta Iyengar and Prahsant Iyengar.

After the workshop, the film, “Leap of Faith” will be screened. If you cannot come to the workshop but would like to attend the screening of the film you are welcome to do so at no charge.

“Leap of Faith” is a film that “spans 9 decades of Guruji Yogacharya BKS Iyengar’s life and over 70 years of his practice and teachings.” “It shows him as a Guru, a Teacher, a Husband, a Father and a Shishya – a multifaceted personality.”

George Dovas started practicing yoga in 1999 and has made three trips to Pune to study with the Iyengar family. On his most recent trip in November 2008 he spent two months at the Institute. During this time he also attended the birthday celebrations for Guruji BKS Iyengar’s 90th Birthday.



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.

Room 406 New Victory House, 93 Wing Lok St, Sheung Wan, Hong Kong

www.iyengaryogahongkong.com 2541 0401