



SVADHYAYA

Volume 4, Issue 2

A Newsletter from The Iyengar Yoga Centre of Hong Kong
2006

November



Praschant Iyengar, Geeta Iyengar and Gururaj Iyengar

“Go on a journey from self to Self, my friend...
Such a journey transforms the earth into a mine of gold”
Rumi

Yoga Journeys

By Linda Shevloff



Teachers from our studio have faced some challenges over the past few months. In June, Kristine Hodge, George Dovas and Randa Westland traveled to Canada to take their first assessment in hopes of becoming certified as Iyengar teachers. All three of them did very well and have now become certified at the Introductory II level. Then in July and August, Krissey, George, Randa and Ursula Moser went to India for a month of study with the Iyengar family in Pune. In October, I went to Toronto for a further yoga assessment and I was given Senior Intermediate I certification. All of us share feelings of relief at having completed something difficult, and joy at the outcome.

In an Iyengar Yoga assessment, it is almost certain that every candidate is nervous and is looking for inner courage to conquer their fear. Of course, most examinations in any field have an element of tension associated with them, but the Iyengar assessments seem particularly demanding as they test one on so many levels. They comprise three basic components: a lengthy written examination; a timed two hour presentation of your yoga practice that is observed and graded by a group of assessors; and then two teaching sessions where the candidate is at the last minute given several poses to teach to a group of students who they probably have never seen before. In a determined period of time they must teach the given poses with skill and understanding, while all the while being graded and timed. Certainly all who have been through one of these assessments will feel they have really been

tested and have gone through a rite of passage, transforming them from student to teacher.

The journey to India for yoga study at The Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute is another challenging experience. One does not come here to be a casual yoga practitioner or a yoga tourist. This is a place for serious study. Although the classes can be very large, the teachers are watchful and can see if individual students are listening and following with concentrated effort.

Mr. Iyengar frequently appears in class and observes the group. From time to time, and unexpectedly, he selects a student from the crowd and then draws the whole class around to make a point about a pose. Usually there is an error that needs correction. If one is the selected student in these situations, the lesson given will have heightened effect and will certainly penetrate on both a physical and mental level. To be in his presence at a time like this can be frightening. It can also be completely liberating because he provides moments where there is a chance to face something and to change it. The moment always requires that we drop our pride so that we can learn something we are missing. Sometimes doors are opened, the vision clears, and new understandings arise.

Mr. Iyengar often chastises his students for their weaknesses and then he inspires them with his words and example.

“Venture from the known to the unknown,” he says .”

“Yoga is the golden key which unlocks the door to peace, tranquility and joy.”

“Yoga is a mirror to look at ourselves from within.”

“Training of body and mind leads to awareness of the soul.”

In pursuit of this deeper awareness, we journey on. Articles in this issue of Svadhyaya focus on thoughts about these yoga travels.



George Dovas, Kristine Hodge and Randa Westland

Studying at RIMYI – August 2006 Pune, India.

By George Dovas

During the month of studying Yoga at the Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Institute in Pune, the question of purpose arose.

At the Institute, I attended a Pranayama class taught by Geeta Iyengar. The class was attended by approximately 100 students. Entering and setting up for the class was noisy and stressful with 100 students organising themselves with props and vying to get a place on the floor.

The class was conducted in the early evening. It would commence just as the sun was setting

for another day. In the twilight, the room would quickly become still.

Geeta's instructions ensured that I lost sense of everyone else and instead had a sense of myself – from which the journey within began.

During the class I was alert and my concentration was sharp. It was a deep practice. In the finality of savasana Geeta instructed us to “be nowhere”, to “be no one”. I was overcome with a deep feeling of “aleness”.

Initially I was confused as to whether I was experiencing “loneliness” or “aleness”. The following day I used written reflection to explore these feelings. It was not “loneliness” that I felt; it was “aleness”. This was deeper than I have ever felt before.

My feelings were borne from the question in the depths of my psyche “What will I do with this life time”? There are billions of us on this earth. What will make my life worth while? How will I make a difference?

I contemplated the purpose of my life – how does one measure the worth of their life? Is measuring the worth of my life something that I should even be doing or was that my ego looking to feed itself?

I discovered my desire for recognition. I discovered how I measure my worth in this world by the worth that this world puts in me.

Soon after my trip to Pune I came across a quote from Guruji. He said:

"Yoga touches man at all levels of life: physical, mental and spiritual. It is a practical method for making one's life purposeful, useful and noble."

Steadfast on the path of Yoga I resolved what I needed to do and the direction I needed to head in. ♥

Thoughts on India- July trip to Pune to attend RIMI

by Kristine Hodge

My July trip to Pune, India to attend the Iyengar Institute for a month was long awaited as we'd booked our places two and a half years before. The trip came hard on the heels of our assessment in Saskatoon, Canada in mid June and I felt as though I'd travelled all over the world to finish my Level I/II certification. So it was with a sense of breathlessness that I arrived Pune.

India is a country of such conflicting, chaotic, sense assaulting impressions that I have chosen just a few to share with you.

I'll start with the highlights.

The yoga: Being able to practice without distraction or interruption at the Institute and attend classes taught by Geeta, Prashant or a member of the family was a privilege for which I am extremely grateful. I say "without interruption", except when Mr Iyengar would notice something and interject with an instruction, correction or scolding! Practicing in the same room as Mr Iyengar and a hundred students from around the world was a wonderful and unforgettable experience.

The people: Almost everyone I met was friendly, helpful and smiling; with a few notable exceptions.

The weather: It was a very pleasant temperature of around 24 degrees, with little pollution and quite comfortable with no aircon needed. This was a surprise.

The food: Some absolutely delicious Indian food with a wide variety of fresh breads made from different flours were a revelation.

The countryside: It was green, lush and quite lovely. The enormous, magnificent, old trees around Model Colony were especially

beautiful for it is rare to see so many mature trees in urban areas. They grew right out of the middle of the footpaths often blocking the way.

The silence: At night after the traffic had died down.

The calm, omnipresent stray dogs: They didn't move from your path necessitating you to step over or walk around them. Clearly they had never been kicked or abused and had not learnt to cower like dogs in other societies. The goats, donkeys, oxen and the occasional camel were also unfazed by people or traffic.

Having Randa to share the experience and getting to know Ursula better: What great company to have. Meeting Kavita from Hong Kong who spends her summers in Pune and being shown some interesting places I would never have found without her "inside knowledge". Meeting Desiree, a student of Linda's now living in Pune and sharing some insights into India and yoga from her perspective.

The shoes: What luck to find comfortable, lovely shoes for great prices. I have trouble finding shoes to fit my yoga feet.

The books: Great books, great bookstores and very reasonable prices. I bought 30 books, mostly hardback classics.

...And the downside: The dirt, the poverty, the chaos and knowing even the best laid plans may completely collapse. Then learning to accept that-reasonably calmly.

The noise of the autorickshaw horn: Constantly tooting and sometimes completely deafening.

The bombs in Mumbai: I had put my two daughters (16 & 19) in a car at 5pm to go back to Mumbai to catch a flight to HK. The seven bombs went off an hour and a half later, about the time they would be entering the city. I lost contact with them for 18 hours. With the mobile network down and landlines overloaded, the driver was not contactable. I was assured they would be returned to me by 1:30am, but they didn't arrive. It was only when they appeared in the arrivals hall at Chek Lap Kok, midday next day that I learned they were safe.

Not having our other yoga buddy George with us: He arrived for August.

The food: By the end of the month I was craving fresh, raw salad and veggies and couldn't wait to get home to my Hong Kong kitchen and make myself something.

It was an amazing experience, one I will treasure and never forget. Thank you Linda. ♥



Practice time at Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute



Krissey's Daughters with Ursula on the street in Pune



Kristine Hodge during practice time

Studying at The Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute, Pune 2006

By Randa Westland

This past July, I had the pleasure of attending yoga classes at the Ramamani Iyengar Institute in Pune. We were given a schedule for the classes that we could attend. It included six classes a week and six personal practice sessions. Three of the classes were taught by Geeta Iyengar, (Mr. Iyengar's daughter), two by Prashant Iyengar (Mr. Iyengar's son), and one by Sunita (Mr. Iyengar's daughter). The classes were held in the main hall. They were jam-packed, mat to mat, with students from all over the world.

Guruji (B.K.S. Iyengar) has retired from officially conducting classes, but, during one class, while he was doing his own practice at the back of the room, he was also watching us. Suddenly he began to deliver instructions that undoubtedly received the attention of the whole group, alerting us and confronting us with our lack of understanding of the basics. Immediately his instructions from the back of the room took over the whole class.

Each member of the Iyengar family teaches in a different manner, reflecting their own personal approach and experience. This makes the classes particularly interesting because the teachings are presented on so many levels that they can touch the participants in the way they are ready to receive them. But definitely there is one thing they all have in common: they all deliver their instructions with loud, direct, clear language.

The personal practice sessions were fantastic. It was inspiring to do my practice amongst many experienced and dedicated practitioners. The atmosphere was great and conducive for better concentration and less distraction. It allowed me to do much more than I manage in my solitary practice. Besides, each day we could see Guruji and Geeta doing their own practice as well. It is quite a privilege to do our practice in the same room with them.

During my stay, I shared a three bedroom apartment with two wonderful dedicated yoga teachers (Noah and Melissa). The apartment had a beautiful large terrace where we could have our quiet time, eat our breakfast, share our experiences and have nice big gatherings. Not to forget to mention, we also did our laundry on the multi-purpose terrace using buckets and the garden hose.

My Hong Kong yoga friends, Krissey and Ursula were also there. We had dinner together almost every night of the month. We explored the city together riding in rickshaws, offering food to the beggars instead of money, eating at the basic thali restaurants as well as the exquisite expensive hotel restaurants, shopping for books and shoes and all sorts of things, carrying umbrellas most of the time trying to avoid stomping in the "dark" colored rain puddles.

Visiting RIMYI in Pune as a whole was a great experience in terms of yoga, culture, and understanding of how to make the best of things when life is simple and basic. I am looking forward to my next visit to Pune. ♥

Would you like to contribute an article to this newsletter? Please submit your writing and photographs to Linda@iyengaryogahongkong.com

We look primarily for writing about your Iyengar yoga experiences and any reflections you have about your yoga practice.

Please send as an attachment to an email.

ONE MONTH IN PUNE

by Ursula Moser

My first month-long stay in Pune was very special indeed. As I already briefly visited Pune in December 2004 for Geeta's birthday, I was able to get a first experience and this time, the place was not totally unfamiliar.

There were more than 100 people at the Institute who had registered for the July classes. Geeta, Prashant and Geeta's sister Sunita were all teaching classes, which gave us a very nice variety of asana practices.

I had not had classes with Prashant before and I wondered how they would be. He has a reputation for being the philosopher of the Iyengar family. During asana classes his commentary was very complex, and I found it hard to understand everything. When I went back to the hotel after class to write some notes, my mind went blank! There were not many poses he taught, but there was a theme, or a topic he used for each lesson and he wanted us not only to use it in our asana practice, but also to apply it to our lives.

Prashant's classes were very challenging, but differently challenging – I never experienced doing poses like this before. He gave precise instructions, guiding us through the poses, including a great number of little details about how to use the breath and really work the pose under the skin.

Iyengar practitioners know that Prashant had a car accident years ago that badly broke his arm and has since then altered his asana practice. According to an interview, Prashant states that his accident was not a mishap to him, as from his mother he inherited the gift of tolerance and taking everything in its stride. He much more believes that the accident even contributed to his life – it has not taken away anything from him.

I can only learn from such a positive attitude! His experience gave me a strong message : do not get stuck. If conditions change, adjust quickly!

Prashant applied this instruction in one of his classes when he taught Utthita Hasta Padangusthasana. He wanted us to notice how the pose feels when we do the main action of the pose first (lifting one leg, straightening it) . Then we were to adjust to this condition by lengthening the torso, lifting the abdomen, keeping the shoulder bones back, and the shoulder blades down and in, with the head straight.

Then he wanted us to do the pose differently by taking the leg up, but stretching through the torso first, lifting the abdomen, bringing the shoulder bones back, shoulderblades down,, head straight and lastly working the legs. We were to adjust to the different conditions and notice, how it felt.

For me there was a powerful message: whatever life brings, accept it, deal with it and adjust immediately – even if it seems impossible at first! I think, it is remarkable how Prashant has dealt with his situation and he has proven that often something negative, even devastating can turn into an opportunity and make us stronger.

Prashant used a number of quotes, but one I especially remember: "Philosophy of life cannot be learnt in a classroom, it is learnt through action and experience!"

This one month in Pune at the Iyengar Institute was an experience I will truly treasure, and I am already looking forward to going there next time. By then, I hope to understand Prashant's classes much better and enjoy them even more!

♥

Events at Our Hong Kong Studio

Lauren Cox : Guest Teacher in October

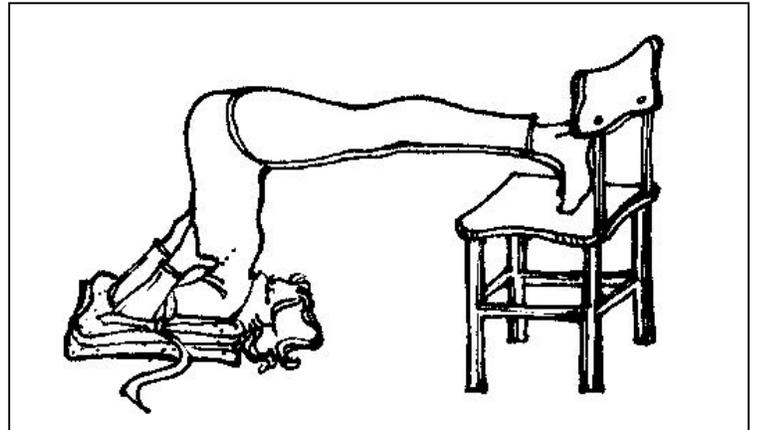
While Linda was away for the month of October, Lauren Cox, from Victoria, Canada, came to manage the studio and teach Linda's classes. Throughout the month she seemed to delight and entertain everyone who came to the centre. Lauren is full of energy and Light, and she has an infectious laugh that keeps everyone in good spirits. Thank you for your help Lauren. We miss you .



Lauren demonstrates a pose



Lauren Cox and Kathy Cook



One of Lauren's Yoga Drawings

Iyengar Yoga Workshop with Birjoo Mehta

Thursday January 25 – Sunday January 28, 2007



“Removal of Contortions to Reach a Pose”

In this workshop, Birjoo will present ways to bring simplicity into your practice.

Birjoo Mehta lives and teaches Iyengar Yoga in Mumbai, India. He and his parents are all Iyengar yoga instructors and direct students of BKS Iyengar. Birjoo has accompanied Mr. Iyengar on many of his international journeys and conferences, often demonstrating poses for him during teaching sessions. In recent years, Birjoo himself has been giving Iyengar Yoga workshops internationally. He comes to Hong Kong with the blessings of his guru, BKS Iyengar in order to strengthen the Iyengar community here.

Thursday, January 25- Intermediate Class 10:00 am- 1:00pm (3 hr)
- All Levels Class 7:00 - 9:00pm (2hr)

Friday, January 26 - Intermediate Class 10:00 am- 1:00pm (3 hr)
- All Levels Class 7:00 - 9:00pm (2 hr)

Saturday, January 27 - Pranayama - 8:00-9:00am
- All Levels Workshop Part a)Standing Poses - 10:00am -1:00pm (3 hr)
- All Levels Workshop Part b) Inversions & Forward bends- 3:00pm - 5:00pm (2hr)

Sunday, January 28 - Pranayama - 8:00-9:00am
- All Levels Workshop Part a) Back bends & Twisting. - 10:00am -1:00pm
- All Levels Workshop Part b) Recuperative - 3:00pm - 5:00pm

All 3 hour classes \$500, 2 hour classes \$350, Pranayama \$200

*Happy Birthday to
Shirley Daventry French*



*On the occasion of her
75th Birthday*

*Thank you for coming to Hong Kong and teaching us
annually for the past ten years*

*With Much Love,
From The Hong Kong Iyengar Yoga Community*

Shirley Daventry French writes a regular column called “Reflections” in the Iyengar Yoga Centre of Victoria Newsletter.

The following is an excerpt from one of her recent articles, in the July/August 2006 issue.

“Samsaya” or doubt is one of the nine impediments cited by Patanjali in sutra 1:30. In yoga, a pupil who doubts his or her master cannot make much progress; in fact, would be deemed unworthy to be a disciple. A guru or yoga master will see beyond your external form to what lies beneath. They will sense the karma you have accrued in this life or past lives, which can be mitigated by certain acts in this lifetime. If you present yourself to this teacher asking to be taught by them, and should they accept you as their student, this forms a contract. It is their duty to help you alleviate past *karma* by your actions in this life, and you will be expected to surrender. If you cannot do this, then they will wash their hands of you.

In the second class on the second day of my first time in Pune, I faced this predicament as Guruji confronted me and pride reared its ugly head. Thanks to my early training with Swami Radha I was able to draw back from my discomfort (which was not physical) and see that I had a clear choice. I could accept the admonishments, listen to his instructions, and learn from this incredible teacher who was later to become my Guru – or I could hold on to my pride. *What right has he to speak to me in this way, I didn’t understand him. His accent is unfamiliar. I have just traveled half way around the world and am jetlagged etc.etc.* The litany of readily available excuses is endless.

Pride is a favorite tool of the ego, always ready to jump in whenever there is an opening. Does this mean we should tolerate all behavior? No, of course not! Yoga also teaches us discrimination. There are times we must intervene and take action. But those of a similar nature to mine have to be wary; it is important to choose which dragons to fight;

otherwise one becomes drained, worn out and exhausted. The readiness to intervene quickly is invaluable in emergencies; but on another occasion may rob someone else of their chance to act or learn.

Discrimination is the key to finding balance and coming to know yourself. At the same time as it is harder for me to do nothing than to act, for others, it will be quite the opposite. Eventually we have to go beyond this duality and come to a state where in every situation there is a choice rather than a compulsion to act or not to act.

The *Bhagavad Gita*, an allegory in the form of a dialogue between a seeker called Arjuna and the god Krishna, captures the struggles common to most of us as we try to bring spiritual values into our lives. It points out that even if we choose not to do something we are performing an act, that there is action in inaction. Moreover that we must act as long as we are here on earth, therefore it behooves us to consider our actions carefully.

As we begin to develop awareness of our thoughts, words and deeds, life becomes richer but not necessarily easier. The ego holds on tenaciously, creeping up and surprising you at unexpected moments, full of wily ways to seduce you into believing that what is in its best interest is also in your best interest. The more you progress in yoga the more difficult will be the challenges, as the ego, beginning to sense a threat to its existence, intensifies its efforts. We have seen, in the current era, how some gurus, after reaching an exalted state and despite the powers they have accrued, have fallen from grace.

Many people start yoga looking for peace of mind; but reading the life story of any great person, you will find their greatness came from facing and rising above their challenges... ♥

Iyengar Yoga for Everyone in the Family



You may have seen this lovely photo in a recent advertisement for the Iyengar Yoga Centre of Hong Kong. The nice thing about it is that everyone in the photo is from the same family and all have had different reasons for doing yoga at our Centre.

Victor Ling (in the back) does yoga to eliminate aches and pains from tennis.

Victor's wife Michelle Yeung (standing on the right) began her yoga practice to see if it could help eliminate her stiffness, sleepless nights, fatigue and ensuing depression. Now she says: "After attending yoga class a few times, I began to practice some simple asanas at home for 15-30 minutes every morning before work. To my surprise, the tightness and pain did not bother me for whole days and disappeared completely. I realized that I could help myself instead of relying on others. In these couple of years, I have transformed. I have opened up more, smile more often than before and sleep soundly every night."

Carole, daughter to Victor and Michelle, (seated in front of her mom in a twist) began yoga because she was diagnosed with developing scoliosis problem. She came to yoga reluctantly and didn't like it at first, but now she says: "I have benefited a lot from doing yoga, for example, I know how to stand straight instead of slumping and my overall posture has improved. I am glad that I didn't quit at the beginning. Now yoga has become a part of my life and I intend to continue doing it for the benefit of both my mind and body."

Carole's sister Ann (doing a backbend in front) likes to come to class with the family when she can. She is playful and flexible and has a lot of fun.

Clara, Michelle's sister in law, took some classes for pregnant women at the studio. She has just recently had a lovely baby.

Yvonne, Michelle's sister (standing pose on left) began yoga for the challenge of learning some of the poses and because she thought that the teachers she saw looked so much younger than their actual age. She has discovered that yoga has helped her with her emotions and she does not get angry as much as she used to. Yoga has even helped to get rid of a problem of swelling in the feet and ankles.

There is really something in a regular yoga practice for everyone. Why not introduce your family to yoga too?

The photo was taken by Ulana Switucha



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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