SVADHYAYA

Volume 5, Issue 1 A Newsletter from The Iyengar Yoga Centre of Hong Kong January 2007

Statue of Patanjali

Chanting the Invocation to Patanjali

By Linda Shevloff

Most yoga classes at our yoga centre begin with a chanting of "The Invocation to Patanjali". This ancient Sanskrit chant is one that is always recited by our teachers in India at The Ramamani Iyengar Yoga Memorial Institute and it is chanted in Iyengar centres worldwide.

Guruji B.K.S. Iyengar teaches yoga in the Ashtanga Yoga Tradition of Patanjali. Patanjali was a sage who lived about two thousand years ago in India. He is recognized as the one who wrote *The Yoga Sutras*, recording very old yoga principles that had been passed on in an oral tradition, by writing them as aphorisms so that they would not be lost over time. These Sutras now form the basis of the yoga we study. Additionally, Patanjali is also credited with having recorded a treatise on grammar and with writing a text on Ayurvedic medicine.

While there are no real historical records about this sage, there are legends. In statues he has grown to god like stature and is depicted as having the upper body of a man and the lower body of a coiled snake. The hood of a many-headed cobra rises above his head. He has four arms, with two hands in namaste, and the others holding a disc and a conch shell. The conch shell is symbolic of power of listening to the sounds within, while the disk represents the power of a concentrated mind.

Why do we chant to Patanjali? There are a number of reasons.

When we sit together as a group and recite these ancient words, we form a link with those of the past eras who practiced the science of yoga before us. We are reminded of tradition, and of our connection both with the past and the future. Through this link we may recognize that our lives are not isolated from the stream of life. Perhaps by following the tradition we might come to realize that what we do in the present is carried into the future, and hence we might become more aware of what we are doing with our lives now.

The chanting itself is calming and it helps to centre our minds on the yoga practice we are about to undertake. The Sanskrit language was thought to have been the "perfect" language. Each sound was meant to affect the energy vibrating through the body. Each word was thought to be sacred. By chanting the old Sanskrit we have an opportunity to feel these vibrations.

Another reason that we chant is to create the right state of mind to approach our yoga practice. Geeta Iyengar has said that the chant makes us "come down a little bit" and become more humble. We become small when compared to all that has gone before. Without humility it is not possible to learn this science.

The words of the Invocation are printed on the opposite page. Now you may also find them on the website www.iyengaryogahongkong.com On the website it is possible to click on a sound byte link to hear the voice of BKS Iyengar chanting the Invocation♥.

The Invocation to Patanjali : Sanskrit

Yogena cittasya padena vacam
malam sarirasya ca vaidyakena
yopakarottam pravaram muninam
patanjalim pranajaliranato'smi
abahu purusakaram
sankha cakrasi dharinam
sahasra sirasam svetam
pranamami patanjalim.

English Translation

OM

Let us bow before the noblest of sages Patanjali, who gave yoga for serenity and sanctity of mind, grammar for clarity and purity of speech and medicine for perfection of health. Let us prostrate before Patanjali, an incarnation of Adisesa, whose upper body has a human form, whose arms hold a conch and a disc, and who is crowned by a thousand-headed cobra.

Reflections on The Yoga Sutras Class

By George Dovas

The Essence of Yoga

On numerous occasions I question the purpose of doing yoga. Why do I spend time coming to classes? Why do I spend time practicing yoga? Why do I spend money on travelling to workshops and intensives?

At times when work commitments and other obligations are calling, the question becomes even greater. Would daily life be easier to deal with if I didn't have yoga or does yoga in fact help me to deal with life. Inevitably, the latter each time affirms itself as true.

To further understand then how yoga works, I endeavour to understand what yoga is.

More specifically, what is the essence of yoga? The essence of something can also be described as its spirit or heart. What is the heart of yoga? What is the spirit of yoga?

I feel that one can better understand the essence of what yoga is through studying the yoga sutras. It has been said that almost all forms of yoga practiced today are based on the yoga sutras.

The yoga sutras, with the depth that they cover and for the fact that they are written in sanskrit (an ancient language) can make the prospect of understanding them seem daunting, So daunting, that it may be tempting to avoid the job of unravelling and comprehending the sutras at all.

I remember an analogy that Prashant Iyengar used during a class in India.

Prashant's analogy was of a man standing on the shore watching the ocean.

By watching the ocean from the shore, he could claim to know the ocean, its colour, its temperament. He could claim to see all the way to the ocean's end where the horizon is. However, is the horizon where the ocean ends? How much can one really know of the ocean without immersing themselves in its water – to know the feeling of the waves lashing against the bare skin, to feel the temperature of the water, to feel the buoyancy of the water?

Similarly, how can one know yoga without fully immersing themselves in yoga practice and svadhyaya – more precisely without delving into the sutras? Then, one can go beyond asana.

Under the surface of the ocean's water there is a depth un-perceivable and unknowable from the shore. What wonders lie beneath the ocean's surface? In the ocean there is marine life that can only be seen at certain depths.

Studying the yoga sutras allows me to delve deeper into the ocean of yoga, to swim rather than stand on the shore and watch. Through the study of the sutras I can dive deeper and deepen my level of understanding and experience of what yoga is.

Even if I never make it to the ocean's deepest recess or floor bed, I will at least know what it is to swim in the ocean as opposed to watch the ocean from the shore.

My aspiration is to understand and know yoga – so I practice and I study. I study the yoga sutras to understand the essence of yoga – the heart of yoga. I practice so I can feel it and know it innately, intuitively and instinctively.

The Yoga sutras study class was formed to create a forum for all of us to learn and know more about yoga. It is a forum to allow the exploration of the yoga sutras – teachings that are thousands of years old – and miraculously relevant to us today.

It is part academic but largely practical. By practical, I mean that the class allows us to find the relevance of the yoga sutras in our own lives. It helps us to discover yoga in our every day life and to evolve our practice into more than a physical practice – to go beyond asana. Yoga can go beyond the physical realm and help us mentally –perhaps even spiritually.

The sutras class allows us to understand the heart of yoga and feel it's rhythm beating in our own heart.♥

The Yoga Sutras Unveiled

Time: Saturdays, 1:45pm – 2:45pm
Commencing: 6th January 2007 (ongoing weekly)
Cost: $120/class
Instructor: George Dovas
Place: Iyengar Yoga Centre of Hong Kong, Room 406 New Victory House, 93-103 Wing Lok St., Sheung Wan
2541 0401
www.iyengaryogahongkong.com

The aim of the Yoga Sutra Study Class is to work systematically through the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali so that students may gain an understanding of this key yoga text.

Each class will include discussion on a number of key sutras, and time for discussion. Students will be asked to reflect on the meaning of the sutras and explore how these may be relevant in their own lives.

The Yoga Sutra Study Classes are intended to be both serious in content, yet also light hearted and fun in presentation. They are suitable for all students who are open to explore this fascinating text and the possibilities that it offers.

RUN FOR YOUR LIFE

Back for the fourth time, this popular do-it-yourself workshop will give you skills to take your running to the next level. Whether you're getting ready for a marathon or you're a casual weekend jogger, you will benefit.

Linda Shevloff of The Iyengar Yoga Centre will demonstrate good poses for runners: open the chest to maximize breathing, keep the shoulders back, standing tall, balance & of course strengthen & lengthen the legs.

Sher Martelle, Registered Massage Therapist with Sutherland-Chan Centre will instruct in a self-massage routine for injury prevention & treatment. What hurts? We'll work it out.
There will be time for Q & A

Date/time: Sunday February 11th - 12:30-2:30 PM

Location: Iyengar Yoga Centre, Room 406 New Victory House,
93-103 Wing Lok St. (Sheung Wan MTR - A2 exit)

Taking the Practice Beyond the Yoga Mat

by Angela Tam

Angela Tam is a Hong Kong writer/editor who challenges readers to evaluate the consequences of their lifestyle in the modern world. Her most recent book "Sustainable Building in Hong Kong" looks at the construction industry here. In the following article Angela asks yoga students to take the teachings beyond the asana mat.

Angela is a Buddhist and an avid practitioner of Iyengar Yoga at the Iyengar Yoga Centre of Hong Kong.

Iyengar Yoga has been described in many ways but the one that seems to be the most oddly appropriate is "devious". Why is that? While other hatha yoga styles mix in elements of ritual, meditation and chants, etc, Iyengar Yoga is focused on the practice of asanas and pranayama alone.

Practitioners of other styles think it lacks a spiritual dimension, but in fact the beauty of the Iyengar approach is that, instead of imposing a certain spiritual dogma on practitioners that may put off those who already belong to a religion, it simply lets them discover their own spirituality for themselves. The demand for precision goes beyond considerations of safety and correction of postural deviations; if you really pay attention to the details of each pose, you reach a point of stillness where you are basically in a state of meditation.

At this point, though, the challenge goes way beyond the accomplishment of an asana, because the ego can play tricks with us. In an account of a yoga workshop I came across a while ago, a yogi recalled how, as they all got deeper into a difficult pose, feeling blissed out by how well they were doing, the voice of the teacher suddenly thundered through: "It's not about you!"

Indeed, and our thoughts often give us away: "I can't hold any longer." "Hey I can do this now; I couldn't two months ago." "Oh how I hate this asana." "Wow, my lower back doesn't hurt anymore." "Great, that woman's taken my favourite spot."

Well, if it's not about me, what is it about?

Explaining Zen Master Dogen's philosophy – Mr Iyengar claimed Zen practitioners as fellow yogis in *Light on Life*, and you'll see why right here – Buddhist scholar Hee-jin Kim had this to say: "Dogen saw the human body as an important part of the external world. The human body participated in both our inner and outer worlds, and in turn, both the inner and outer worlds participated in each other through the human body. The mind, body and world interpenetrated one another so inseparably that a hard and fast demarcation between them was altogether impossible. With such a view, to cleanse the body was to cleanse the mind; to cleanse the body-mind was to cleanse the entire universe."[1]

This is so because we are made up of the same elements that make up the universe. We know, for example, that the air pollution in Hong Kong is not something out there: it enters our body with every breath we take.

It is so also because our body-mind is the vehicle through which we act on the universe. There is air pollution because power plants are churning out more electricity to meet the demand generated by us, in the process spewing sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide and other pollutants. However much power plants clean up their act, some pollutants will escape into the air in direct proportion to the amount of electricity generated. There is also air pollution – and climate change – because of the rapid expansion of air travel. According to Friends of the Earth UK, air travel is the world's fastest-growing source of greenhouse gases, with the world's 16,000 commercial aircraft generating more than 600 million tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO2) per year.[2]

This is all worrying news and we can all sit at home, read about it and fret for a while. Some of us may even sign a petition urging the government to do something about it, but if we ourselves don't act, not much will change.

Despite widespread misconception, the Sanskrit word "karma" does not mean "fate". It means "action". It means that, instead of being victims of some destiny we can't change, we are the authors of our stories. It means that we can do something about air pollution and climate change ourselves. Settling for a smaller TV (big plasma screens are real energy hoggers), unplugging appliances when they're not in use, and – for many of us, the most traumatic change of all – flying less, can make a huge difference.

The responsibility is ponderous and not to be shirked. Just think: of the six billion people on earth, how many are in the privileged position to enjoy the lifestyle (and associated pollution it generates) we have? And of those who are in a privileged position to enjoy this lifestyle, how many have the further privilege of having discovered the yogic path? Given the privileged position we enjoy and the responsibility we have, what must we do to act on the world, to make it a better place, bearing in mind that, as Faeq Biria constantly reminds us, the universe is no other than our own true Self?

Our practice, if it is to be authentic, can't be confined to the yoga mat. ♥

1. Hee-jin Kim: *Eihei Dogen: Mystical Realist*, pg 103. Wisdom Publications. 2004.
2. Friends of the Earth UK: "Aviation and global climate change". www.foe.co.uk/resource/reports/aviation_climate_change.pdf

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.

Secrets from a Workshop with Shirley Daventry French

by Kitty Wong

This was my third time attending Shirley French's workshops at the Iyengar Yoga Centre of Hong Kong. Shirley taught the first yoga workshop I ever attended. That was three years ago. I still remember the article in the SCMP showing her remarkable perfect headstand at over seventy. It was amazing and unbelievable.

This year I had a little difficulty attending Shirley's classes. I was in the most busy and stressful period at work. My superior was away and I had two new colleagues who needed my help for training. Fortunately, I was still able to attend some of Shirley's classes.

At the workshop I was impressed by the way Shirley made use of live models to demo the poses. When we were doing Urdhva Hastasana in Tadasana, she asked Krissie, George and me to keep the pose. She explained to us the problems of each person. I have to give more effort to keep my lower arms straight and also the lower rib cage. George needed to take more awareness to his upper arms while Krissie's arms were perfectly straight. That made us understand more easily. Now when I'm doing this pose again, I remember I should keep my lower arms straight, like Krissie.

I was also impressed that she used the props to deepen each pose. Like we were doing Utthita Trikonasana with a strap on the hip joint. It was helpful to open our hips and do the dog pose much better. She asked us to use the wooden stick to massage our front foot before we did Parivrtta Trikonasana. It helped to bring more sensitivity to the front foot and it helped with balancing.

At the last class on Wednesday morning, Shirley began with some talking. She asked us to sit close to her and talk about her life experience. How to balance between her family and yoga practice? How to attract people to come to yoga class? How to bring yoga to life? Listening to her was listening to the words of wisdom, though I did not 100% understand. During the class, she was talking about secret teaching, such as the secret of the inner groin and the secret of opening the arm pit chest. At the end, when we needed to do the Salamba Sarvagasana, she looked at my difficult face and asked me what's my problem. I told her that my back was very painful after doing a series of backbends. She asked me to lie down and bend my knees. And then, she sat on me to help me to release my lower back pain. I asked her if it was the secret of the inner groin. She laughed, I laughed and then everyone in studio laughed.

Learning yoga can be fun. Teaching yoga can be fun.. I found myself to have a deeper understanding of her teaching than I did in the past two years.

Thanks to Shirley for her selfless teaching. Thanks to Linda for bringing her to us. Thanks to George for bringing Iyengar yoga to me.♥

Olivia Tang, Shirley and Kitty Wong.
"Shirley always got the two of us mixed up, so we called ourselves *Olitty*"

Photos from Shirley's

Yoga Holidays, Yoga Retreats: The Pros and Cons

Recently an e-mail was sent to students enquiring about their interest in doing a "Yoga Retreat" in Koh Samui, Thailand in September. In retrospect, it would have been better to call this possible trip a "Yoga Holiday". There has been quite a bit of discussion around this idea. Below please see the pros and cons as they have evolved so far.

Pros	Cons
1.The island is beautiful and an idyllic spot.	1.Koh Samui is too far away. Choose somewhere closer. Why not Hong Kong?
2. The weather is good in Samui in September. If the trip was at the end of September it would combine with the Monday, October 1 holiday.	2. Kids are in school in September so teachers and parents can't participate.
3. The venue has all the amenities (secluded beach front, top end accommodation, and specially prepared vegetarian meals).	3. Going to a luxury venue is not yogic . Pleasure seeking is the opposite of what is intended by yoga practices.
4. There is direct service by Bangkok Airways from HK to Samui and if there was a group booking the price would be reduced.	4. Airplanes are a major cause of air pollution and climate change.
5. Samui is a great place to get away from the hectic pace of Hong Kong for awhile.	5. Mr. Iyengar does not have to go on retreats. He retreats into his own self.
6. It would be nice to combine a vacation with yoga.	6. The journey would be better if it were to India where yoga has its cultural roots.
7. The price is reasonable for what is offered.	7. The price is too high. Only the wealthy could go.
8. This is a great idea!!	8.What a bad idea!!

The retreat is on hold for the time being. Meanwhile, classes at The Iyengar Yoga Centre of Hong Kong continue. Between January 1 and February 14 a special daily Yoga Sadhana practice is held daily at 7:00 – 8:30am. Ten percent of the proceeds will go to Medecins Sans Frontieres for medical aid in world disaster zones. Come and participate in our lively and sometimes outspoken yoga community. ♥

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Chinese New Year Yoga

End of the Year Workshop:

"Being Quiet & Becoming Still"

Saturday, February 17

2:00-4:30pm

Re-Cycling Days for Electronic Equipment, Jan. 27 & 28

On the 27th and 28th January NGOs will collect old electrical and electronic equipment for donation or recycling. Items they will take off your hands include computer accessories and household appliances. For more information please check: http://www.epd.gov.hk/epd/english/news_events/events/weee2007.html

There is a collection point in Western, quite close to the studio, so anyone going to Birjoo's workshop may consider dropping off their old stuff en route.

Upcoming Events

January 2 – February 14: Yoga Sadhana, 7:00-8:30am daily

Saturdays from January 6 onward: Yoga Sutras Unveiled. Classes with George Dovas 1:45-2:45pm

January 25 – 28, 2007: Workshop with Birjoo Mehta. No regular classes during the workshop.

January 27&28: Re-Cycling Days for Electronic Equipment

February 11th: Runners Workshop with Sher Martelle and Linda 12:30-2:30pm

February16 through February.25: Regular Yoga Classes Cancelled for Chinese New Year Break

February 17: Chinese New Year Workshop with Linda 2:00-4:30pm

March 4 : Backbend Workshop with Jesse Tong 11:30-1:30

Backbends Workshop with Jesse Tong

Learn the preparations and actions for backbends – expect to work hard!

Sunday March 4th, 11.30am to 1.30pm

$250

Not suitable for menstruating ladies. Open to L1/2 students and above.

The Iyengar Yoga Centre of Hong Kong

Register at 2541401 or email info@iyengaryogahongkong.com

Jesse is a certified Iyengar yoga teacher and has been actively teaching since 2000. She enjoys sharing with students her insights gained through her ongoing study and practice of yoga.

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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