



SVADHYAYA

Volume 1, Issue 1

An Iyengar Yoga Newsletter from the C.W.T. Studio, Hong Kong

January 2003

Svadhyaaya

The First Issue

In the yoga tradition, study is considered to be an important means to self-knowledge. Svadhyaaya is the Sanskrit word that literally means “one’s own going into”, and what it stands for is a serious and systematic study of the yoga tradition. Self study is meant to be a journey of self-discovery, self-understanding and self-transcendence. In the Yoga Sutra of Patanjali, written about 3000 years ago, the sage names self study as one of the important precepts of yoga.

This new little publication has been given the name Svadhyaaya. It is intended to provide a forum for discussion about Iyengar yoga and to transfer information and knowledge about Iyengar yoga to students within our community. The inspiration for this project is the work of Guruji B.K.S.Iyengar, to whom we express our gratitude.

Students are welcome to contribute articles and letters of interest. Svadhyaaya will be published two or three times per year.

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On Becoming an Iyengar Yoga Teacher

By Linda Shevloff

Yoga is a popular activity these days, and in Hong Kong new yoga studios, teachers and methods are blossoming everywhere. For me this situation is both delightful and disturbing: delightful because an interest in yoga suggests that the citizens of our community are longing for a more balanced and spiritual way of life, but disturbing in that yoga is being sold as only a superficial beauty product for weight loss and a youthful appearance. I have been a student of yoga since the 70’s and a teacher of Iyengar yoga since the 80’s, and during that time I have seen quite a few changes in the way the public perceives yoga. Never has yoga been as sought after as it is right now.

Yoga is a vast topic that includes physical, mental and spiritual understanding. Although on the surface yoga may seem to be about physical fitness and flexibility, in reality these are just byproducts of a much deeper study of our own human nature. The goal of yoga is liberation from the misconceptions that bind us. It is a journey toward the discovery of our true inner self. In addition to the poses that people are now becoming familiar with, yoga also includes specific codes of moral conduct, practices for breathing, mastery over the senses, methods to focus the concentration, and a pathway to move into deep meditative states.

Over the eras yoga has been passed on from enlightened teachers to their followers. A teacher or a guru is one who has developed mastery over body, mind and senses and has then imparted this knowledge to his students. According to their capacity, students develop as best they can. There have

been a number of recognized sages in India from the past century including such well known names as Swami Sivananda, Swami Vishnu Devananda, Swami Satchitananda, Sri Krishnamachar, Sri Aurobindo, and many more. These learned masters relayed their wisdom to others. B.K.S. Iyengar, my guru, was an outstanding student of Krishnamacharya. Now in his mid 80's, Guruji B.K.S. Iyengar gives of his time tirelessly to help his students understand even a little of what he knows. Schools of study have developed around these different teachers, and not only in India but worldwide one can find ashrams and study centers based on their oral and written teachings. Traditionally, once one has found a teacher, one studies within that school of thought and follows the methods given. The teacher is revered for his or her wisdom and grace.

Students who are given permission to teach yoga according to their tradition carry the blessings of their guru and they bear responsibility for remaining true to the teachings so that the next generations can take this wisdom forward and develop.

To become an Iyengar yoga teacher there is a process to follow. Introductory Certification takes at least three years to complete, and students admitted into the program must have several years of Iyengar yoga as students before they can be considered for this course. The training is neither glamorous nor easy. Besides the study and practice of the yoga asanas (postures) and pranayama (breathing), there are studies in literature, philosophy, anatomy and teaching. At the end of three years candidates must sit a written exam and do a practical exam where they are observed and rated by an external examining board in their presentation of poses and their ability to teach them. The standards are very high. Then even after one achieves the Introductory Certification, there are further levels of certification to study for, and it is hoped that teachers will continue to prepare for them and expand their knowledge. Junior teachers should study regularly with senior teachers and all are expected to travel to India from time to time to study in month long sessions with the Iyengar family at their institute in Pune.

For me, becoming a certified Iyengar yoga teacher has been more personally demanding than studying at university, for there the expectations were largely intellectual. In yoga, my values, motives, ideas and knowledge have been put

under the microscope and I have been challenged to look at virtually everything about myself. My teachers have all been tough and unrelenting and very kind. They have taught me to take personal responsibility for my life and to develop my strengths and become aware of my weaknesses and work to eliminate them.

I currently run a small teacher training program in Hong Kong, where three student teachers are nearing the end of their second year of training. After one more year of study here they will travel to Canada to be examined by an external assessment board to see if they qualify to become Iyengar teachers. This year Leslie Corcos has been to India to study at the Iyengar Institute, and next year Jesse Tong and Kathy Cook will do the same. I feel quite confident that the three of them have a good foundation in their studies, but in the examination process each one will be alone, trying to show what she knows with confidence and clarity. Many students do not pass. I admire them for the courage and perseverance they show in undertaking this work. Although the rewards may not bring instant fame or fortune, the depth of their studies will undoubtedly provide them with a deepening understanding of themselves. They are truly making the yogic journey.



*Jesse Tong Leslie Corcos and Kathy Cook,
about to begin their third year of teacher
training*

The Invocation to Patanjali

At the beginning of asana classes we chant the Invocation to Lord Patanjali. The words to the Invocation are as follows:

Yogena cittasya padena vacam
Malam sarirasyaca vaidyakna
Yopakarottam pravaram muninam
Patanjalim pranjaliranatosmi
Abahu purusakaram
Sankha cakrasi dharinam
Sahasra sirasam svetam
Pranamami Patanjali

I 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 pure, perfect health.

I prostrate before Patanjali who is crowned with a thousand headed cobra, an incarnation of Adisesa whose upper body has a human form, holding the conch in one arm, disk in the second, a sword of wisdom to vanquish nescience in the third and blessing humanity with the fourth arm, while his lower body is a coiled snake.



Why We Chant the Invocation to Patanjali

By Geeta Iyengar,

IN AN INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY MARGOT KITCHEN AT A 1992 INTENSIVE IN PUNE, INDIA. REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION FROM THE VICTORIA YOGA CENTRE NEWSLETTER, MARCH 2001.

“We chant so that at the very beginning that feeling of sanctification comes from inside, with the feeling of surrendering oneself, because nothing can be learned in this world unless you have the humility to learn. So the moment you think of the Lord at the beginning of doing a practice, you know you are very small in front of that greatest soul. Once that is understood then the other problems which always arise while practicing, mainly concerned with ego, will be affected. You know that you are coming down to learn something. And you can’t learn anything unless you come down. If you think you’re on top and that you know everything, then you’re not a learner at all. In that sense the chanting helps.”

OM

An Explanation of the Meaning of this Sound, Based on the Upanishads

By Shobhana Chelleram

The meaning of this sacred syllable is explained very clearly in *The Upanishads*, the ancient Hindu holy scriptures. “Om” is to the Hindus, the symbol of “Brahman” or God, and in Hindu rituals it is uttered with a solemn and indefinitely prolonged resonance. Brahman, or the Universal Soul” symbolized by Om is invoked in order to obtain guidance, strength, understanding and wisdom. Om is the supreme syllable, the strongest support. He who understands it in its total depth is revered as a knower of Brahman, the Universal Spirit.

The Self symbolized by Om is the Omniscient Lord who is beyond birth and death, beyond cause and effect. He is imperishable, eternal, the life giving source present in all creation. Greater than the greatest, smaller than the smallest, all pervading and Supreme is the Self symbolized by Om.

Om is the symbol of the uncaused cause, the supreme goal of human life, of the soundless, the formless, the intangible, the undying, the tasteless, the odorless. It is a symbol of the eternal and is without beginning or end. Om symbolizes the Immortal Self present in all creation, Lord of time past and future, power of all powers, the force that illumines the sun and energizes the universe.

Om symbolizes both the conditional and the unconditional, the personal and the impersonal. By meditating on it the wise man may attain one or the other. When not fully understood, the syllable Om does not lead beyond mortality. However, when rightly meditated upon, it can make a man to merge with Brahman, leading him to transcend fear, decay and mortality.

Brahman symbolized by Om exists in the five elements: earth, water, fire, air and ether. From it are born “prana”, the

breath or life giving force, and the mind and the sense organs.

Having realized the Supreme Self the sage or yogi is filled with joy. Transcending the dualities of pain and pleasure, mortality and immortality, he becomes free from passion and fear. Attaining self-realization through the knowledge of Brahman, the individual soul merges with the Universal Soul and attains a state of supreme bliss symbolized by Om.

OM-----May Brahman guide and protect us, giving us strength and right understanding. May love and harmony prevail among us all.

OM-----Peace Peace Peace.

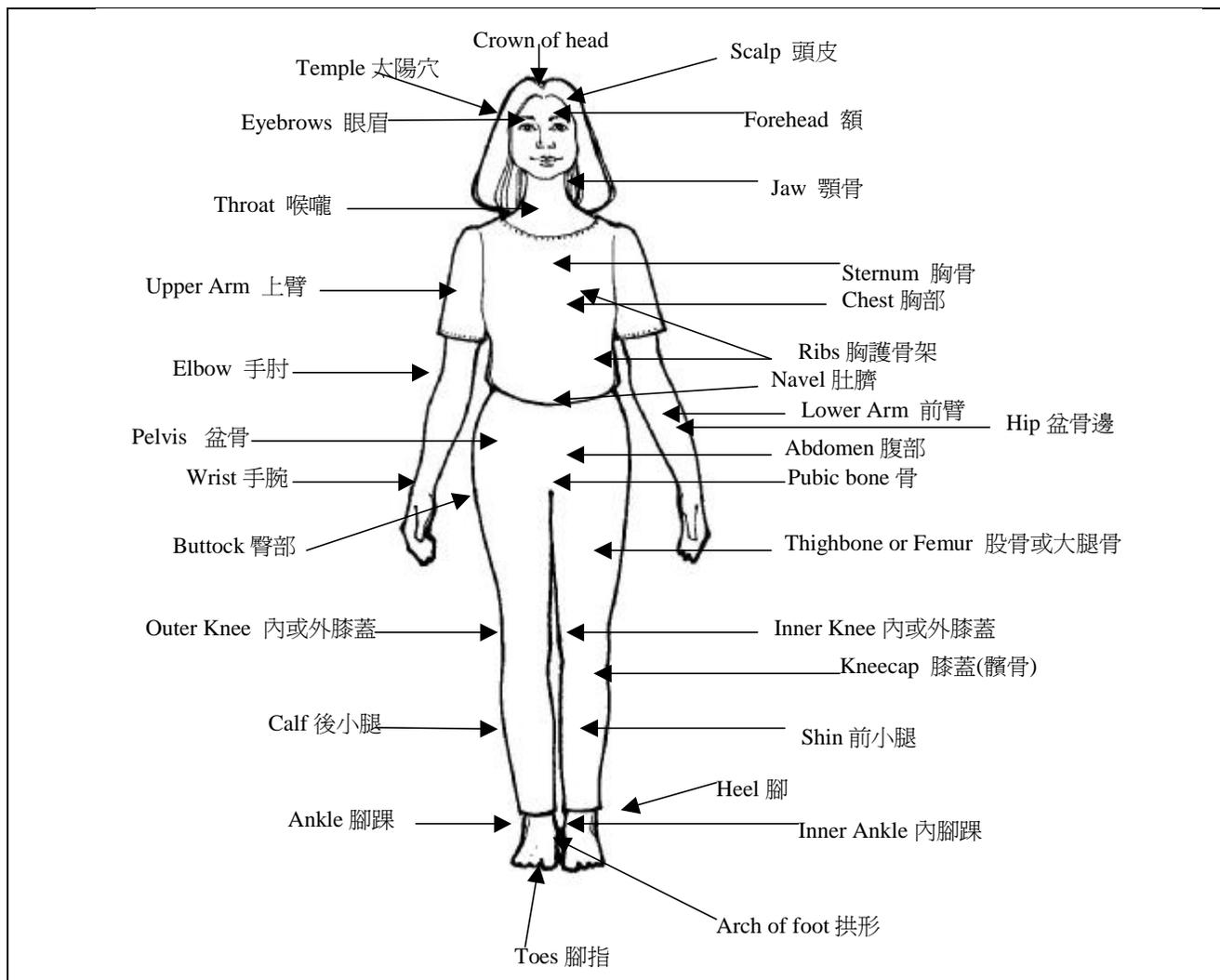


*This Om symbol was a gift from
Shobhana Chelleram to the studio*

Asana Feature: Tadasana

With Some Simple Anatomy in English & Cantonese

Text by Linda Sheloff, Drawing by Lauren Cox, Cantonese translation by Kenny Choi



Tadasana Samasthithi (Mountain Position)

Tadasana is the foundation pose for all other standing poses. While it may appear simple to the novice, it becomes much more challenging when one develops a deeper understanding of balance and alignment. Stand in this pose firmly and observe your position with concentrated intelligence.

Stand with the inner edges of the feet and ankles together. Keep the bottoms of the feet, except the arches, in firm, even contact with the floor. Stretch and spread the toes. Draw the knee caps in and up to keep the knees and legs very firm. Move the thigh bones back until the legs are perpendicular to the floor. Keep the buttock bones down and take the tailbone in. Lengthen the torso, lifting the side ribs and sternum so the chest is open and well lifted. Spread the collar bones and move the shoulder blades down and in so the front chest is firmly supported from the back. The shoulders must be level. Stretch the arms down by the side of the body. Keep the head erect and level. The entire midline of the body should be perpendicular to the ground. The throat should be soft and the eyes steady and quiet. Stay in the pose maintaining an even pressure on the feet and a constant lift of the body. Develop the stability of a mountain.

Setting up a Home Practice

A review of a lesson by Ingelese Nherlan

From the notes of Leslie Corcos

Ingelese Nherlan, a senior Iyengar teacher from Vancouver, Canada, taught a workshop in Hong Kong in December. One of her sessions was about how to set up a home practice



What keeps us from doing a home practice? For one thing...habit! Most of us are in the habit of not doing a practice at home and we find all sorts of reasons to keep this habit in place. Ingelese suggested an activity: write down everything you do simply from 'habit.' Examine your habits. Can you do something different? Can you find time for just 30 to 60 minutes of yoga in the day? If the answer is 'yes' read on!

Before teaching the 'A B C's' of how to physically do a home practice she discussed the attitude to take with you into your practice. Keep your mind with the asana, so resist planning dinner, or worrying about your children, as you are in Trikonasana.

Digest an asana like food. Don't eat too much or too little. In other words, don't overdo it or underdo it. Overdoing it can cause injury and it is useful to remember that the hallmark of a mature yoga practice is knowing when to back off, not letting the ego lead us to 'achieve.' If you underdo it, you will starve your body of nourishment. As you vary your food intake, vary your asanas.

Pay attention to how you are using your thought processes during your asanas. Move from actively "thinking about" an asana to being "thoughtful" in the pose. If you leave your practice with "inner chatter" then it has been too intellectual.

Aim to 'absorb' each pose rather than 'grip' the pose in an attempt to 'get it right.' Instead of gripping, keep open, in mind and body. Pause after each pose to absorb.

Ingelese then explained the physical process of creating a home practice. Each pose should only be held as long as the mind can stay in the pose. If the mind wanders then it is time to come out of the pose. For beginners, it is advisable to do the pose 2 or 3 times rather than increase the length of holding.

There are 3 main types of poses: Standing, Sitting and Lying. She suggested that one or two poses be done from each of the following categories in a one hour practice for beginners: Standing, Inversions, Forward Bending, Back Bending, Twisting and Balancing, Restorative, and Savasana

In order to do the poses we need three qualities: Length, Strength and Openness. Generally people who are strong need more lengthening, those who are flexible need to develop more strength, and we all need our joints to be more open. All asanas are to be done with the breath, creating harmony in the practice.

She suggested that before the practice we ask ourselves, "How do I feel?" The three "gunas" or states of nature were then briefly explained. If one feels heavy and tired, it is a 'tamasic' state. If one is very energetic, it is 'rajasic,' and if we are light and filled with bliss we are in a sattvic state. Tailor your practice to how you are feeling in order to achieve balance.

Ingelese suggested each pose be done three times, the first time with focus on the feet, legs, and arms. This is of great importance as they hold us up! The second time, focus on the spine. The third time observe the breath, making sure it is moving evenly.

When you have finished your practice do not dwell on the negative or what you could have done better. Instead say afterwards: "I'm pleased with my practice. I've done my best. I am content.". Don't think negatively about yourself or

others. Don't be discouraged. Have patience, and be regular in your practice.

Throughout the session Ingelese stressed the importance of referring to the book 'Light on Yoga' to learn the poses and she suggested keeping a file. The file could contain stick figures drawn next to the names of the pose as we begin to do them in home practice. These could be categorized according to the type of pose. Every time a new pose is done it can be added to the file.

Ingelese ended her home practice session answering questions. I particularly appreciated her answer to the question: "What if you just don't have enough time to practice?" Her reply was, "It is better to make a little time, even 20 to 30 minutes everyday to practice yoga to offset having far too much time on your hands if illness comes."

Doing Your Own Practice

By Beccie Vane

All of us have commitments in our lives – work, family, relationships, or study that take up our time. Accept this, life can be full and rich, you don't have to see these things as reasons for not doing some yoga outside of class.

Your own practice, however much or little you are able to do, will enrich the other areas of your life. Don't isolate yoga from the rest of your life. Use it as a tool.

Your practice will give you energy when you're flagging and will give you stability if it seems that everything is getting on top of you.

Yoga can become a constant in your life, something that you can rely on if it feels as if other things are beyond your control.

Learning on your own, about your body, your breath and your mind will enable you to develop *your* own yoga. Everyone has strengths and weaknesses. All of us are flexible in some ways and stiff in others – whether physical or mental – don't see these things as problems, be happy to be you. Yoga shows us how to change what it is possible to change and accept what we cannot change.

Practicalities

However limited your time, whatever you do will be beneficial.

Think realistically about how much time you have available and on what days

Plan when you eat and drink, allow a few hours before you do any practice. So have a snack in the afternoon if you want to do some poses when you get home from work

If your yoga time is in the evening, don't try to sleep immediately afterwards. Inverted poses, headstand, shoulderstand and viparita karani will help you sleep better, but leave at least an hour before you go to bed

In the morning your mind is quiet but your body is stiff so don't expect to jump out of bed and do backbends ! Give yourself time and observe the signals your body is sending you

Don't feel that you need to do a lot everyday. One approach is to set yourself a minimum everyday eg a dogpose (adho mukha svanasana), trikonasana, shoulderstand (salamba saravangasana) and a forward bend. Think about the order of poses that are taught in class, use a book or ask your teacher if you're not sure what to do.

The great thing about setting yourself a minimum – even if it's just a dogpose a day, is that it will invariably snowball. Once you make that decision and get on the mat your body will want to do more and often it will surprise you and amaze you!

You don't need to do dynamic, challenging asanas all the time. At the end of a stressful day it is best to do restorative poses. If you're going through a 'hard time' or your head is 'busy', or you are sick – do quiet work- forward bends, supine poses over the bolster and viparita karani. Find out what works for you, then you can develop your own practice.

Use books: *Light on Yoga*, *Yoga the Iyengar Way* or *Yoga The Path to Holistic Health* and ask your teachers if you have a question, even if you think your question is trivial, dumb or embarrassing.

The words of BKS Iyengar are very inspiring as well as practical.

"LOVE, LABOUR and LAUGH" – BKS Iyengar

Shirley Daventry French Returns to Hong Kong



All of those who have studied with Shirley during her previous visits to Hong Kong will be happy to hear that she will be teaching another workshop in March 2003. Shirley has been teaching in Canada for over 30 years, and she travels widely giving workshops nationally and internationally. Her teaching is clear, precise, insightful and integrates the philosophy and psychology of yoga with the practical work of asana and pranayama.

Shirley will be at The Celestial Wishing Tree Yoga Studio from Friday, March 7th to Sunday, March 9th. The weekend workshop will be for students in Level II classes and above.

**Friday, March 7: 7:00-9:00pm
Saturday, March 8: 2:00- 5:00pm
Sunday, March 9: 2:00-5:00pm**

To Register: Call the studio 2541 0401 or check the website www.yoga-hongkong.com

ABOUT THE CELESTIAL WISHING TREE YOGA STUDIO

The studio is an Iyengar Yoga school. Teachers are certified Iyengar teachers or are enrolled in teacher training programs leading toward certification. Linda Shevloff, the studio owner is certified at the Junior Intermediate II Level. Rebecca Vane holds Introductory Certification. Jesse Tong, Leslie Corcos and Kathy Cook are about to begin their third year of teacher training.

Yoga classes are available for Beginner and Intermediate students, Levels I-IV. Please check the website for the complete schedule : www.yoga-hongkong.com The studio is located at 2/F Winsome House, 73 Wyndham Street, Central, Hong Kong. Telephone (852) 2541 0401 to leave a message, or fax (852) 2541 0501. E mail linda@yoga-hongkong.com

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

CHINESE NEW YEAR CLOSURE:

JANUARY 31 – FEBRUARY 3

The studio will reopen on February 4. Kung Hei Fat Choi.

SHIRLEY DAVENTRY FRENCH YOGA WORKSHOP:

MARCH 7-9 FRI - SUN

Shirley Daventry French is a Senior Iyengar teacher from Canada who teaches in Hong Kong annually. She will be returning to Hong Kong in November.

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FAEQ BIRIA YOGA WORKSHOP:

SEPT 22-28 MON- SUN

Faeq Biria is a Senior Iyengar Teacher who runs the Paris Iyengar Institute and who travels worldwide, teaching workshops and assisting with teacher training programs.