



SVADHYAYA

Volume 1, Issue 2

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

May 2003

Svadhya

In the yoga tradition, study is considered to be an important means to self-knowledge. Svadhya 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..

The inspiration for this newsletter is the work of Gururji B.K.S.Iyengar, to whom we express our gratitude.

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

Yoga and Transformation

Life in Hong Kong is intense at the best of times, but recently stress levels have been particularly high. We have had the pneumonia scare, an economic downturn, rising unemployment, and weapons of “mass destruction” lurking on the horizon. Although opinions differ on how to best recover from these difficulties in order to revitalize the city spirit, there is a lot of help available for us personally within the field of yoga. The balance and calmness of a yogic state of mind can only help to bring some composure and clarity to our situations.

Yoga is a transformative practice meant to expand awareness. It is a practice meant to bring about personal change. We can look at yoga ethics (Yamas and Niyamas), asana and pranayama practice, concentration and meditation, or the study of yogic texts, and all provide invaluable lessons for making positive shifts in our experience and understanding of life.

This issue of Svadhya includes a look at personal ethics (Yamas) and how they might apply to a yoga asana practice. Included also is an article illustrating poses that could be done at home in a restorative manner to strengthen the immune system. There is a reflection on some of the lessons to learn from the Bhagavad Gita, the revered Hindu text that can still speak to us today.

In learning yoga we can develop clarity and free ourselves from the confusion of the moment and come to discern the difference between the real and the unreal, the important and the insignificant. Our vision can improve, and hence our hindsight, foresight and intuition. If we seek wisdom, wisdom will emerge. This very moment is the perfect teacher.

Linda

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Yoga Ethics: Yamas on the Yoga Mat

By Linda Shevloff

The Iyengar yoga we practice is based on the eight-limbed system described by Patanjali in *The Yoga Sutras*, written between two and three thousand years ago. The first tier or limb of that system addresses the personal moral principles or “yamas” that should be observed by yoga practitioners in order to make progress on the yogic path. Although these principles were encoded a very long time ago, they continue to have relevance today.

The yamas are as follows: Ahimsa is non-violence. Satya is truthfulness. Asteya is freedom from avarice. Bramacharya is control of sensual pleasures. Aparigraha is non-covetousness. These basic ethical concepts are meant to guide us in life.

While it is useful to consider the ways that these concepts are pertinent to life in general, it is also practical to understand how they might be significant in our practice of yoga asana. Our approach to postures on the yoga mat can be seen as a reflection or even a magnification of our characters in a more general sense. If we can come to see ourselves clearly during yoga practice, we can begin to make changes in our broader lives.

It is obvious to most people that we should not be violent in our dealings with others, and in fact there are laws in every corner of the world that prohibit violent behavior. Ahimsa, or non-violence applies both to violence against others and violence against ourselves. If considered in terms of what we are doing on a yoga mat, ahimsa means that we should not bring harm to ourselves when we practice. If we approach poses with an aggressive attitude, pushing our bodies further than they are currently capable, then injury easily results. If we practice carelessly physical misalignments can be reinforced. Conversely, if we practice in a very casual, half-hearted manner, with little awareness of what we are doing, we are also more susceptible to injury and even if no physical injury results we still have injured ourselves karmically for we have spent our time doing nothing at all and have completely wasted it. In yoga we come to recognize that time is precious commodity and it is limited. In order to do a yoga practice and do no harm it is vital that we are attentive to what we are doing, being mindful of the way we enter a pose, maintain a pose, and exit a pose. It is important not to over or under do actions. Ahimsa requires awareness so that we cause no harm.

How might Satya or truthfulness be observed in yoga? The issue can come up in subtle ways, but it is helpful to recognize that we need to be first and foremost honest

with ourselves. For example, if kneecaps are “up” when a teacher is standing beside us and dropped when the teacher has moved on, then there is an issue of truth to look at. We might be performing a pose to make a good impression on others but we haven’t realized how the actions we are doing are meant to be for ourselves. The teacher has no vested interest in whether our kneecaps are up or down. These kneecaps belong to us, and we are developing our own integrity through the practice. It is helpful to internalize the question of truth and develop a sense of personal integrity in our practice. We are only asked to do our best, and we can individually evaluate our efforts. Teachers act as good reminders, but in the end we need to take responsibility for ourselves.

Asteya is freedom from avarice. It is possible to be greedy on the yoga mat. We can try to accomplish too much too soon, without proper regard for the time and effort needed to condition and prepare our bodies properly. We can expect too much of ourselves or of our teachers, wanting attention, experiences and instant results. *The Yoga Sutras* instruct us to act without attachment to results. The attitude of non-attachment can act as an antidote for our latent greed. A quiet mind is content, not restless or seeking more and more satisfaction.

Bramacharya means control of sensual pleasures. Most of us perform some poses with difficulty or discomfort whereas other poses are soothing and easy. If practice primarily consists of pleasing poses then we get caught up in a kind of sensuality. By seeking comfort and avoiding challenge, we begin to lose strength and stamina, and become weak, ineffective and lazy. If our practice has no balance, then we make no progress.

Aparigraha or non-covetousness refers to not longing for what others have. Wishing for someone else’s abilities and talents, fosters jealousy and comparisons of ourselves with others can be the ground for dissatisfaction and restlessness. In yoga we have to come to terms with our own strengths and weaknesses, abilities and challenges, in order to develop. This is our own life’s work. Everyone has challenges, and we each meet our particular challenges in different situations. We cannot experience someone else’s life, nor can we learn their lessons. Practicing aparigraha reminds us to accept ourselves and to look within to find our personal path.

Observing the yamas in asana practice helps to develop integrity, clarity, and humility. We also can come to experience a tremendous joy that accompanies authentic, integrated action of the body, mind and spirit.

A Yoga Practice for Strengthening the Immune System

Constant stress has a negative effect on the body's immune system. Yoga poses done in a restorative manner can induce relaxation and strengthen a weakened immune state. Some poses are particularly beneficial in that they regulate body functions, calm the mind and aid in the circulation of blood and lymph throughout the body.

In "Yoga for Health" a well-illustrated book presenting Iyengar Yoga practices for various special needs, there is a sequence for helping to strengthen the immune system. The sequence is described below for those who wish to do it at home. If you have a sturdy coffee table or a couple of chairs, several blankets, a belt, and some ingenuity you could do this practice. If you have equipped yourself with bolsters, a yoga mat, a strap and some yoga blankets, as well, then even better.

Each of the poses below could be held for five to ten minutes, but if you feel discomfort in a pose and cannot correct yourself, then do not hold it. The sequence takes about two hours. If Pranayama follows then additional time is needed. To shorten the practice, select some of the poses below, but do them in the order given.

Using props correctly takes practice and instruction. Ask questions of your teacher if you are uncertain, or attend the restorative class to become familiar with positions. In the poses below it is important to keep the chest open and lifted. There should be sufficient support so that there is a state of relaxation, not tension that is experienced. Remember to place yourself in a pose symmetrically, the right and left sides of the body mirroring each other.

The Sequence

- 1 Setu Bandha – as shown the pose is supported on four bolsters. At home you could use two lengthwise bolsters with a few blankets folded on top for extra height, or one bolster with blankets and the feet resting on a stool or a tall block. The chest must be lifted and full. Strap your thighs to prevent the legs from rolling out.



- 2 Supta Baddhakonasana with a bolster under the torso, a folded blanket under the head, a strap on the legs, and a block or blanket under each thigh for support. The head should be high enough that your chin descends toward the chest without compressing the throat.

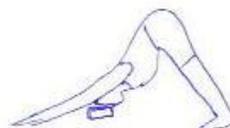


- 3 Supta Virasana - on a lengthwise bolster (or a bolster plus some blankets for extra height if needed) with the head raised even higher on a folded blanket. If your knees spread out to the sides, put a strap on them to keep them parallel.



- 4 Setu Bandha again as in #1

- 5 Adho Mukhasvanasana – support the head on a block or blanket. Too much height under the head will jam the neck. Have sufficient height to let the head release down onto the support.



6. Sirsasana – the regular pose, can be done near a wall if necessary for balance



7. Viparita Dandasana – lying on two chairs so that the feet are the same height as the buttocks. If you don't have chairs at home you could use a long coffee table under the pelvis and legs. Put a sticky mat on it and a folded blanket under your back. Have the edge of the table or chair just below the bottom tips of the shoulder blades. Support the crown of head with a bolster and as many blankets as needed. Be on the top of the head with the head supported, but not so high that the neck is jammed. The chest should be lifted and full. Use a strap on thighs so the legs do not roll out, and put extra height under your heels to counter compression in the lower back.



8. Salamba Sarvangasana - Done with shoulders on a flat bolster or folded blankets and the back or buttocks supported by a chair. In this version the legs are vertical.



9. Ardha Halasana - with support for the legs - a chair with a bolster on top works well. The tops of the shoulders are on a flat bolster or on several folded blankets. The arms rest beside the head.



- 10.. Setu Bandha – repeat as in #1

11. Viparita Kirani – pelvis on a bolster with additional blankets on top or on two bolsters . Legs are against a wall. Strap the thighs if they tend to roll out.



11. Savasana - with back raised on one or two blankets folded lengthwise under the spine and head and the head raised even higher on another folded blanket. Use an eye bag or an eye wrap if you have them.



Ujjya or Viloma Pranayama can follow relaxation. Stay on the same props as for savasana .

Every month, teachers in training at the studio write a paper on a given topic. The most recent paper was on the Bhagavad Gita, a sacred Indian scripture. The question was to consider the story of the main character, Arjuna and to discuss him both as a hero and as an average human being like ourselves.

Arjuna, The Hero of The Gita

By Leslie Corcos

The Bhagavad Gita, 'Song of the Lord,' is one of the world's finest mystical scriptures and is embedded in the Mahabharata, a literary Indian epic written between 1000 and 700 B.C.E. The Gita takes place on the battlefield of Kurukshetra in Northern India and is the dialogue between Arjuna, a highly skilled warrior, and Sri Krishna, who poses as his charioteer. Sri Krishna is actually 'the Lord,' as he is an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, an aspect of God, who works to preserve the universe against forces of destruction and corruption.

Ostensibly, the battle in the Gita involves Arjuna leading his brothers to fight, against their own cousins, in order to regain the throne for his oldest brother, the rightful heir. However, from a mystic's point of view, the real battle depicted is the epic of the inner spiritual struggle of the human condition.

Arjuna is a superior soldier and has trained for years in the arts of war, yet on the morning of the battle, he is filled with reservations. One of the heroic qualities that Arjuna displays is courage and this is expressed through his reservations about whether he should fight his relatives. On the morning of the battle he asks his charioteer, Sri Krishna, to drive him onto the field between the two armies to survey the forces. When he sees his own cousins and uncles assembled he asks, *How can we gain happiness by killing members of our own family?* 1/37.

Arjuna has the courage to stand back and question his actions, actions for which he has spent his life training and preparing. In life, individuals follow paths on which they work or educate themselves towards attaining certain goals. It takes courage to listen to our inner voices, which sometimes urge us to step back and question our actions. It is often easier to stay busy, like hamsters racing around in our wheels, than to step off the wheel and look at our lives from a new, perhaps wider or deeper perspective. What we learn, if we have the courage to stay open to change, can modify the course of our existence.

In the case of Arjuna, if he had not questioned his actions, he would never have learned the life changing lessons from Sri Krishna which make up the text of the Gita.

At the end of the dialogue, Arjuna's last words are.. *You have dispelled my doubts and delusions, and I understand through your grace. My faith is firm now, and I will do your will.* VIII/73. Arjuna is ready to engage in battle, not, in my opinion, a battle involving violence, but a battle within himself to discover his own spiritual truths. I am reminded of T.S. Eliot's lines from 'The Wasteland':

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time*

Arjuna has indeed arrived where he started, that is on the battlefield with Sri Krishna, yet understands his position with a whole new awareness.

Arjuna is an average human being, like ourselves, in that he expresses the qualities of confusion, doubt, limited awareness, and fear. These qualities are illustrated in his questions to Krishna throughout the Gita.

Initially, he voices the quality of confusion, when he says he will not fight. *I have fallen at your feet; give me instruction. What can overcome a sorrow that saps all my vitality?* II/7. Krishna reminds Arjuna of his immortal nature, his real Self, which never dies, for it is never born and so is eternal. Krishna goes on to describe yoga, not that of physical postures, but of evenness of mind, detaching from the dualities of pain and pleasure, success and failure. He tells Arjuna that if he can establish himself in yoga, in unshakable equanimity, profound peace of mind, he will be more effective in the realm of action. *Therefore devote yourself to the disciplines of yoga, for yoga is skill in action* II/50.

The quality of doubt is apparent in Arjuna when, instead of asking more about the belief system of those established in the Self he wants to know their outward mannerisms and how they physically conduct themselves in life. *Tell me of those who live established in wisdom... how do they talk? How sit? How move about?* Sri Krishna answers that... *they live free from lust, fear, and anger... fettered no more by selfish attachments, they are neither elated by good fortune nor depressed by bad. Even as a tortoise draws in its limbs, the wise can draw in their senses at will.* II/54, 55.

The limits of Arjuna's awareness are illustrated by his question, *O Krishna, you have said that knowledge is greater than action: why then do you ask me to wage this terrible war?* III/1. Instead of responding to Krishna's words in the previous chapter about an immortal soul, Arjuna worries about his immediate predicament and whether he should fight or pursue knowledge, seeing things in black and white, not understanding that the two paths are directly linked. Krishna explains, *Perform all actions for my sake, completely absorbed in the Self, and without expectations, fight!-but stay free from the fever of ego.* III/30

Continued on page 6

Arjuna expresses the quality of doubt yet again in chapter VI after Krishna addresses the importance of meditation. Krishna explains, *Those who aspire to the state of yoga should seek the Self in inner solitude through meditation. With body and mind controlled they should constantly practice one-pointedness, free from expectations and attachment to material possessions. VI/10.* Arjuna responds, *How can the mind, which is so restless, attain lasting peace? Krishna, the mind is restless, turbulent, powerful, violent; trying to control it is like trying to tame the wind. VI/33.* Krishna reassures Arjuna saying, *It is true that the mind is restless and difficult to control. But it can be conquered Arjuna, through regular practice and detachment. VI/35.*

Arjuna obviously feels fearful and doubtful when he asks Krishna, *If a man becomes deluded on the spiritual path, will he lose the support of both worlds, like a cloud scattered in the sky?...remove this doubt that binds me. VI/38.* Krishna attempts to dispel his fear and doubt, answering, *Arjuna, my son, no such person will be destroyed. No one who does good work will ever come to a bad end, in this world or in the world to come. VI/40.*

Finally through all of his questioning Arjuna learns that he is being asked not to fight his family, but to fight his own lower self. Basically the Gita is an internal dialogue between the ordinary human personality, full of questions about the meaning of life, and our deepest self, which is Divine. Krishna represents the spark of Divinity lying at the core of the human personality. *I am the Self in the heart of every creature Arjuna and the beginning middle and end of their existence. X/20.*

A significant lesson for Arjuna from the Bhagavad Gita was the realization that he was more than merely a physical body and that within him was established a firm center of spirituality. He learned the importance of withdrawing the senses and becoming strongly concentrated or one-pointed in his actions in order to access his inner stillness. In this stillness the workings of the mind can be more clearly observed. Thoughts generated from the ego can be identified in their stages of infancy and let go before maturity.

Through the process of one-pointed concentration and stilling the mind, Arjuna was able to access his inner Self, or Atman, which is the eternal core of each of us. As a result, Arjuna was able to embrace the Lord of Love in his own heart and in the hearts of those around him.

*Still your mind in me, still yourself in me,
And without doubt you will be united
With me, Lord of Love, dwelling in your heart. XII/8*

Teacher News

There are three new students beginning the teacher training program at the studio. Please welcome Kristine Hodge, Randa Westland and George Dovas who will be observing and assisting in Level I classes this year.

Kathy Cook, Jesse Tong and Leslie Corcos, now in their third year of this three year program, teach Level I and II classes at The Celestial Wishing Tree and elsewhere in the city. They are preparing for their assessment for Iyengar Certification in North America next year.

Beccie Vane has moved from Hong Kong to work elsewhere, but she may reappear at the studio and teach from time to time.

A YOGA WORKSHOP

With

Faeq Biria

For Level II & III students

September 24-28

at

The Celestial Wishing Tree Studio

Faeq Biria is the director of the Centre de Yoga Institute de Paris. He is one of Mr. Iyengar's foremost disciples and a worldwide ambassador for his work.

Faeq has traveled in various countries throughout the world, helping them implement Iyengar certification and assessment. He travels to India annually and is a strong link in the worldwide community of yoga in the Iyengar tradition. Some students from Japan may travel here to join us for the HK event.

This workshop will offer a rare opportunity to study with a dedicated and inspiring teacher. Why not book a few days off work to take the whole workshop, fully immersing yourself in the depths of Iyengar yoga with Faeq Biria. This is a chance not to be missed. He would like to work with same group of students for about five hours per day, for the full five days. It is my hope that all Level III students from this studio can attend.

Details of times and prices will be available soon. Call Linda at the studio at 2541 0401 or check the web site: www.yoga-hongkong.com

Shirley Daventry French Was Here



Shirley French visited the studio in March, and once again provided inspiration and well-grounded instruction in the art of asana, whether we were on our feet or our heads.

The photo above shows a way to work on the legs in sirsasana (headstand). This work began in tadasana (mountain pose) where we focused on alignment from the foundation of the pose in the feet, up through the legs and into the torso.

In tadasana with a block between the knees we stood with the feet hip-width apart, our weight on the back of the big toe mounds, spreading the weight across to the outer mounds, and broadening the heels on the floor. With a block between the knees in a horizontal position and weight on the tripod of the foot we straightened our legs and became aware of the strong inward rotation required. Shirley instructed us to press the thighbones back and plug the tailbone into the body and feel our full height. All the while, our eyes were to be kept soft.

Then we turned upside down into sirsasana and did the same action again. This time the foundation was in the arms and head. We pressed the outer and inner edges of the elbows into the mat, and kept the little finger edges and wrists pressing down, creating height through the hands. We lifted the buttocks up and moved the waist back. With a block between the knees we once again became aware of the strong inward rotation required in the pose. The thighbones were to move back and the tailbone to plug in.

SHIRLEY'S WORDS OF WISDOM

“Yoga helps us to get in touch with the constant in ourselves, the undisturbed part of ourselves beneath all the roles, which is the Self.”

“Yoga is well-being of the body, mind, and Self, and helps to make life's journey. It does not make the journey easier, but more fruitful and prepares us for the next challenge.”

“If you can keep the mind still for the blink of an eye you become enlightened.”

On Yoga Teachers

In his book *The Tree of Yoga*, Gururji, BKS Iyengar lists some of the qualities of a teacher, in a rather alliterative fashion.

“The requisites of a teacher are many, but I would like to give a few words for you all to catch, understand and work on. Later, you can discover many more. The teacher should be clear, clever, confident, challenging, caring, cautious, constructive, courageous, comprehending, creative, completely devoted, and dedicated to knowing the subject, considerate, conscientious, critical, committed, cheerful, chaste, and calm. Teachers must be strong and positive in their approach. They must be affirmative to create confidence in the pupils, and negative within themselves so that they can reflect critically on their own practice and attitudes. Teachers must always be learning. They will learn from their pupils and must have the humility to tell them they are still learning their art.”

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

Mon.	Level I	12:00 – 1:30pm	Linda
	Pregnancy	6:00 – 7:15pm	Linda
	Level II	7:30 – 9:00pm	Linda
Tues.	Level I/II	7:30 – 9:00am	Kathy
	Level I	10:00- 11:30am	Kathy
	Level II	12:45– 2:15pm	Linda
	Level II/III	6:15 – 7:45pm	Linda
	Level I	8:00- 9:30pm	Linda
Wed.	Level III	10:15 –12:15pm	Linda
	Level II	12:30 – 2:00pm	Linda
Thurs.	Level II	10:00 – 11:30am	Kathy
	Pregnancy	12:15 – 1:30pm	Linda
	Level I	7:30 – 9:00pm	Linda
Fri.	Restorative	1:00 - 2:30pm	Linda
Sat.	Level I	10:00 – 11:30am	Linda
	Level III	12:00 – 1:30pm	Linda
	Level I	3:00 – 4:30pm	Jesse
	Level II	5:00 – 6:30pm	Linda
Sun.	Level I	2:45 – 4:15pm	Jesse

Phone to register for classes and to check for availability of space. Classes may be purchased in groups of four or eight, but drop-ins are available. Monthly packages are also an option.

YOGA BOOKS AND PROPS

Currently there are yoga mats and straps for sale.

If you wish to place an order for large bolsters, pranayama bolsters or wooden blocks, please contact Linda before June 15. Large bolsters with removable covers are \$400. Small bolsters are \$200. Blocks \$80.

The following Iyengar texts are in stock: *Light on Yoga*, *Yoga A Gem for Women*, and *Yoga in Action: A Preliminary Course*

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. Jesse Tong, Leslie Corcos and Kathy Cook have begun their third year of teacher training.

Yoga classes are available for Beginner and Intermediate students, Levels I-III. 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

YOGA FOR A HEALTHY BACK – MAY 21, 7:00-9:00PM
LINDA INSTRUCTING.

PETER SCOTT WORKSHOP –(SPONSORED BY THE YOGA SOCIETY OF HONG KONG); MAY 22–25- PETER SCOTT IS AN IYENGAR TEACHER FROM AUSTRALIA. SOME REGULAR CLASSES WILL BE CANCELLED DURING HIS WORKSHOP AT THE CELESTIAL WISHING TREE. PLEASE CHECK THE SCHEDULE TO CONFIRM CLASS TIMES

SUMMER SOLCTICE SUN SALUTATIONS– SUNDAY
JUNE 21, 10:00AM – 12:00PM. EVERYONE IS WELCOME.

FAEQ BIRIA YOGA WORKSHOP:

SEPT 24-28 WED- SUN. FAEQ BIRIA IS A SENIOR IYENGAR TEACHER FROM PARIS IYENGAR INSTITUTE. CHECK THE AD IN THIS ISSUE.

SHIRLEY DAVENTRY FRENCH WORKSHOP:

NOV 22-28 DETAILS TO BE ANNOUNCED