SVADHYAYA

Volume 3, Issue 2 A Newsletter from The Iyengar Yoga Centre of Hong Kong May 2005

On The Practice of Yoga

Pure, Simple and Sacred Existence

"Real evolution is the evolution of inner awareness, which expands and penetrates deep within and without. Though it is easy to feel purity and divinity within, it is hard to maintain this uninterruptedly. One has to question oneself and analyse how this divine purity fades very often and gets unknowingly interrupted. So both purity and simplicity should not be lost in our Sadhana (practice). One has to recharge the filtered memory to ripen it again so that it guides one on the right path of yogic practices and saves one from a fall from purified life. The fire of yoga should be burning throughout one's yogic practices with this ripened memory until one reaches the goal. Memory is dropped only when the goal is reached. The goal is the soul. Nothing remains at this state except pure being which is "sat". Sat is pure and sacred existence, free from bondage, free from everything. This ultimate freedom comes through dedicated and devoted practices of yogic disciplines in life."

BKS Iyengar - From a talk at Oxford University, 1976

Practice , the Heart of Yoga

Linda Shevloff

The theme of this issue of "Svadhaya" is "Practice". Practice is at the very heart of the study of yoga. In the *Yoga Sutras*, Patanjali identified two aspects of learning yoga that must go hand in hand: "abhyasa" and "vairagya", practice and renunciation, or practice without attachment to results. This is the attitude to develop if we are to make progress in yoga.

But what are we to practice? Certainly in our study of yoga asanas and pranayama there is a lot to practice - so many poses and so many instructions. For beginning students it can be difficult to know where to start. At first just coming to class and learning some yoga is enough in itself. However, at some point, a serious student will want to take the instructions from yoga class and do some yoga alone, regularly, at home. This is the time when the real study of yoga begins. In this issue, I've included some notes I made during Chris Saudek's evening workshop on Setting up a Home Practice.

Asanas are only one part of the eight fold path of yoga. We are also meant to practice behaving in an ethical manner and refrain from harming others or ourselves. We are to attend to our attitudes so that we become pure, contented and disciplined. We are to have respect for life and reverence for the source of life. Our actions, interactions and decisions, at work or in society, should be guided by this way of thinking. What a better world it would be if we would make non-harming, and truthfulness our priorities.

Patanjali identified four types of practitioners: feeble, average, keen and supremely enthusiastic. Chances are that most of us would be classified as feeble or average, or sometimes keen. Whatever our level of practice, let us encourage each other to persist so that over time we become the people we wish to be, and we further ourselves on the path of self-realization.

Samadhi
(Illumination)

It is impossible to pinpoint
Where the body ends
And the mind begins,
Or where the mind ends
And the Self begins

When you are fully in the body
You meet the soul.

Samadhi is the state
Where there is only pure
awareness.

Spiritual sadhana begins
When you go beyond
What you consider to be
Your maximum effort.

Aphorisms of B.K.S. Iyengar

Setting up a Yoga Practice:

A Forum with Chris Saudek

In March when visiting senior instructor Chris Saudek taught a workshop series at the Iyengar Yoga Centre in Hong Kong, she spent an evening on the topic of establishing a practice at home. The evening included good information for yoga students, a lively discussion and a short yoga practice to conclude.

She began by asking participants why they started yoga. She wondered what intentions they had when they originally started. Some of the group said they began with the idea of getting some exercise and gaining flexibility. Several students began yoga because their doctors or physiotherapists recommended it to relieve the pain and imbalance in their bodies. A few began with a desire to find meditative quietness, and some wanted to relieve stress or boredom.

Those in the session were very enthusiastic about the benefits yoga has brought into their lives. They said:
"Yoga makes me focus on the things I really want to do in my life."

"Somehow when doing yoga I have to face myself."

"Yoga is calming, both physically and mentally."

"Yoga fixed my shoulder.'

"Yoga helps me to get my life in perspective."

"Yoga makes me happy."

"Yoga has given me incredible physical and mental strength."

"Yoga helps to relieve the pain of past injuries."

"Yoga gives me a mirror on life. It is a microcosm of life, a way of being steady, and teaches me to be steady in my life."

But when we discussed the daily practice of yoga at home, very few of the group had an established yoga practice. Really, they had come to this forum to get some help in putting together a practice at home because they knew how beneficial that would be. Chris concurred that a yoga practice is a hard thing to set up, but that it is a vital component of studying yoga.

She spoke about the Yoga Sutras, where Patanjali identified three requirements that must exist in order to create change through yoga. These three components make up what is known as Kriya Yoga or the yoga of action.

The first is "tapas", which means zeal or drive within a person. There must be enthusiasm about the subject.

The second is "svadhyaya" which means self study. A student must come to study himself and to study the texts and writings about yoga in order to have an understanding of the subject.

The third requirement is "Isvara Pranidhana" which means having devotion to God and to the essence of life itself. We need to deeply consider our purpose in life and reflect on why we exist in the world. All three of these requirements are needed in order to really start practicing yoga.

Chris said that you start practicing yoga when you see that the benefits are so great that you make it a priority and set aside some time for it in your day. At first this may just be twenty minutes, but for that time, focus only on yoga.

She noted that in the *Yoga Sutras*, Patanjali does not talk so much about yoga asana. He says that firmness of the body, steadiness of mind and benevolence of spirit constitute yoga. If we really look at ourselves and recognize that our internal essence is the same as everyone else's, then we develop compassion and benevolence of spirit.

Yoga is an experience that is not learned through books or by just coming to class. Creating a personal yoga practice helps you to develop in your life. A class helps you to start your own practice.

In his discussion about the *Yoga Sutras*, Mr. Iyengar talks about evolution and involution in yoga practice.

The first four limbs of Astanga yoga help us to *evolve* as individuals within the world. The first limb is formed by the "Yamas" which are meant for the regulation of the practitioner's social behavior. The Yamas include five social restraints: non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, chastity, and non-greediness. The second limb of yoga, the "Niyamas" are about self-restraint, where we need particular qualities that help us to develop. The Niyamas include purity, contentment, zeal, self-study and devotion. Asanas form the third limb of Astanga yoga, and Pranayama is the fourth limb.

The second four limbs take us more deeply within, and are about our internal development or *involution.* Pratyahara, the fifth limb is withdrawal of the senses. It means not always being attracted by the external, but to learn to draw your attention deeper within. Dharana is the sixth limb, and it means concentration. We develop our capacity to hold our attention on the subject we wish to penetrate. The seventh limb is Dhyana or meditation, and the eighth limb is Samadhi, sometimes translated as ecstasy, transcendence, or enlightenment. Chris said that even though the concepts of the last four limbs of yoga may seem very far away, after a good yoga class you might feel so centred and good that you really just want to come back. You have probably had a little experience of some of these states.

Many people start yoga through asana, but if it is only asana that you do, after a while it will start to feel meaningless. Mr. Iyengar's way of approaching yoga is to start with what we know. We know the physical body, so we start with asanas and those practices that begin there. Asanas give us a place to start looking at ourselves. We open the channels within our own body, and we gradually learn to withdraw the senses and see and hear within.

When you start to practice on your own, you need to become your own teacher and really look at yourself.

Make practice a priority . You should have a clean, quiet place for practice and it is best to have a specific time. In the morning you will be more alert and energetic, but it may be that you have to practice later in the day. Some people do their active poses in the morning and the more quiet poses later in the day. If you practice pranayama breathing, do this separately from your asana practice, or at the end after savasana. The scriptures say to do pranayama at sunrise or sunset. You need to look at your schedule.

You should arrange your eating schedule around your practice because you can't do asana or pranayama on a full stomach. Two hours should pass after a snack or four hours after a large meal.

How do you actually start a practice session?

Just start. Even teachers have days when they don't want to practice or they feel tired. On days like this, Chris said she just lies over her back bend bench in this state for awhile. This simple position itself draws her to do more. Maybe she will do a dog pose next, and she will want to do yet more. A practice just develops.

But in the very beginning, what should a student practice at home? There is an evolution to the practice itself. At first one should practice standing poses. The poses themselves can be carried through into your life where you observe how you stand. Standing poses work on, posture, strength and endurance.

Later you can introduce inversions. You might simply lie on your back with your legs up the wall, or do shoulder stand. Next add seated poses and forward bends. After that you can introduce some twisting. Later on, but not at first, do some abdominal work. Abdominal work is tricky if you are not ready for it. Then include some backward extensions. Remember not to do headstand until you can do shoulder stand, and that within a practice session, headstand should be done before shoulder stand, but you can do shoulder stand without doing headstand at all.

Chris gave out a printed handout that included some possible sequences to practice at home. She included some sequences for short practices. She noted that Iyengar teachers are very well trained in putting together good sequences and they understand the effects of the sequences. That is why students generally feel very good at the end of an Iyengar yoga class.

Here are some examples of the short sequences for home practice that Chris provided. Each of them could be done in about half an hour, but it is up to you how much time you spend. She used the Sanskrit names of the poses that we use in class and encouraged students to learn the names. To help, get a book like *Light on Yoga* by B.K.S.Iyengar to guide you.

A Short Home Sequence with a focus on Standing Poses:

Adho Mukha Svanasana
Uttanasana
Tadasana
Trikonasana
Parsvakonasana
Virabadrasana II
Virabadrasana I
Uttanasana
Chair Saravangasana, Viparita Kirani or Supta Baddha Konasana
Savasana

A Short Practice Sequence with Forward Bends:

Adho Mukha Svanasana
Uttanasana
Trikonasana
Parsvakonasana
Parsvottanasana
Prasarita Padottanasana
Janu Sirsasana
Paschimottansana
Marichyasana III
Savasana

A Short Restorative Sequence

Adho Mukha Svanasana with support
Supta Baddha Konasana
Setu Bandha with support
Savasana

A Sequence if you have a Headache

Supta Virasana
Supta Baddha Konasana
Supported Forward Bends
Viparita Kirani
Savasana

The Practice of Self-Inquiry

Chris led the group through a short practice sequence, and gave examples of the kinds of questions students could ask themselves while doing these poses at home.

1.Adho Mukha Svanasana : (Downward Dog)

How am I using my organs of action? (the arms and legs)
What is my brain telling me?
When I came out, why did I come out? (Are you agitated? Tired?)
Where do I have to work to lift my energy?
What do I do next? (Students wanted Adho Mukha Virasana to relax, so they did)

2.Uttanasana: (Standing Forward Bend)

We generally do feet hip width apart at first.
How do you position yourself? There are lots of ways to do it.
What is your intention in the pose? To stretch more? To push harder toward full pose? To become quiet?
The way you do it depends on why you are doing it.

3.Tadasana: (Mountain Pose)

Note how you are balancing. Where is the weight?
How am I working with your body?
Am I even?
How am I lifting my chest?
Am I making adjustments or compensating for adjustments?

4.Uttitha Trikonasana:(Triangle Pose)

How wide is the stride of this pose supposed to be? (Look in a book to check if you don't know.)
Start with the feet apart and parallel. Re-create tadasana action.
Stretch the arms out.
What is the alignment of the body?
Am I still drawing up through my legs?
What do I have to resist? Where do I have to stabilize?
As you come into the pose you can ask, "What are some things I have learned in this pose before?" Is my ego in the way? Am I going too far and losing my alignment? Am I keeping the spread of my chest? What do I have to do to make this pose possible?

5.Uttitha Parsvakonasana: (Sideways Angle Pose)

(Take a wider stride. Keep feet straight ahead at first and then turn.)
How wide do the feet need to be?
How do I come down?
Look at yourself. Is my front leg actually forming a square?
Sometimes it is good to put the hand on the hip.
Is there anything I can do to open the body a little more?
How do I stretch the arm? Is the alignment correct? Do I feel stretch, strength and equanimity?
How do I come up?

6.Virabadrasana I: (Warrior I)

Now, turn the back foot in more to turn the hips around.
Have your hands on the hips to feel them turn.

When I turn, am I tilting my hips or turning?
How do I bend and form a square with my leg?
Stretch the arms up.
How do I feel about this pose?
Where am I tensing unnecessarily? How is my breath?
Change sides.
How do I have to turn my back leg?
What is holding me back? (You have to find out.)
Where do I stretch your arms from?

As there was little time, Chris had students do a restful pose that could open the chest, Setu Bandha. There was no time for Salamba Saravangasana (Shoulder Stand)

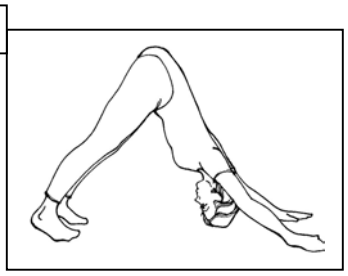
7.Setu Bandha : **(Little Bridge)**

(Students used a block for the feet, a bolster under the torso and a blanket under the head and shoulders.)

In the pose ask: Can I be in the pose without a lot of effort?
Am I comfortable?
Am I opening my chest?
Close the eyes and relax. This pose can be like Savasana. Find out where you can soften, where you can relax.
If the mind wanders, bring it back with your breath. Feel the gentle movements and rhythms of the breath.
Knowing well that exhalations release tension, let the next exhalation be deeper and more complete to completely let go.

The Sequence:

1



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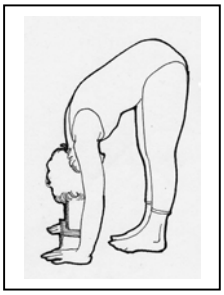

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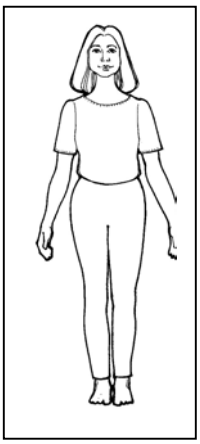

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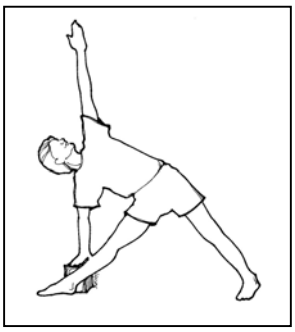

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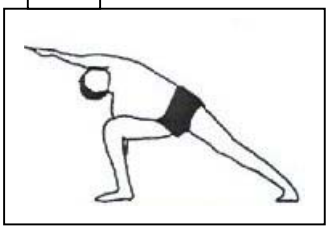

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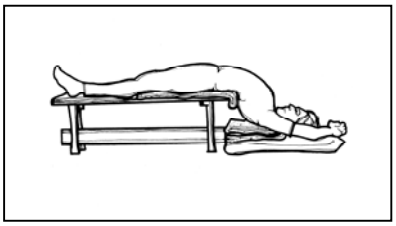


Illustrations #1-4 & 7 by artist and yogi Lauren Cox, Victoria, Canada

The Practice of Eco Yoga

Yoga writer, Georg Feuerstein discussed the topic of the environment and yoga in his text "Sacred Paths",(Larson Publications, 1991). In the chapter entitled "The Practice of Eco Yoga", he addresses the responsibility we have for the state of the environment. In particular, he looked at the ways the Yamas and Niyamas (ethical principles of yoga) should apply to our treatment of the world around us.
He said:

There is an ecological crisis on the planet due to "overpopulation, disadvantageous population distribution, over-consumption, wasteful patterns of consumption, inappropriate uses of technology and egocentric, short-sighted ways of thought."

The basic principles of yoga, the **Yamas** and **Niyamas**, give us rules for moral restraint and self-discipline.

Non-harming (**ahimsa**) consists of reverence for all forms of life. We should "choose a lifestyle that will not rob other creatures of their ecological niches. If we take this rule seriously, we should adopt a vegetarian diet. The least we should do is ensure that our consumption of animal products (meat, eggs, and dairy) does not in any way support the cruel treatment of animals."

Non- stealing (**asteya**) implies that we should not take more than what we need for ourselves, and in particular we should not waste food.

Greedlessness (**aparigraha**) means that we should live in a balanced, non-grasping manner which respects the rights of others to share the resources of the planet.

Purity (**sauca**) can mean that we do our best to eliminate pollution in our own life and support efforts that seek to clean up our environment at large.

"We cannot hope to find ourselves, never mind the Divine, so long as we obstruct our view by piling up mountains of garbage, or by opaquing the air with toxic pollutants." Yoga teaches us that the body is our most valuable instrument for realization of the ultimate Reality. "The Earth is our body, and it is the only one we have. If we destroy it, we commit suicide."

His Guidelines for Cultivating Eco-Yoga:

1. Make a serious attempt at understanding our present age and the historical forces shaping it.

2. Become fully aware and informed about the problem.

3. Live a simpler, ecologically sensitive life.

4. Join forces with a local ecology group and become politically active.

5. Cultivate self-understanding by scrutinizing the motives behind your spiritual odyssey, and be willing to recognize and work with neurotic tendencies masquerading as spiritual ideals.

6. Study the spiritual traditions of the world to deepen your understanding of your preferred path.

7. Stay in touch with the natural environment.

8. Daily remind yourself that life is a precious gift, which must not be squandered, neglected, or abused.

"When we experience life as a spiritual opportunity for which we are grateful, the world ceases to be our enemy."

The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali *and* ***The Bhagavad Gita*** *are two ancient texts that are the foundation for much of our study of yoga. Patanjali's Sutras were written over two thousand years ago. The Gita is even older than that. The Yoga Sutras are a collection of 195 aphorisms that explain how to gain liberation through yoga. The Gita is part of a larger collection of ancient literature that tells the story of heroes and battles in ancient times. The Gita itself expounds the truths of yoga through the story it tells.*

All those studying to become yoga teachers read and discuss these texts as part of their learning.

Reflections on The Bhagavad Gita & The Yoga Sutras

by George Dovas

The Bhagavad Gita deals with the questions that man has faced throughout the history of time. These are questions that regardless of our place in history, regardless of our environment or our technological advancement are the same. These are questions relating to an earthly life – what is the meaning of our lives, how are we to live for peace of mind, happiness and contentment.

There are numerous similarities in *The Bhagavad Gita* and *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* and the root message is the same. Beyond earthly pleasures and pain there is the Spirit that is eternal and is within all of us.

Similarly we learn in the *Yoga Sutras* that through practice and detachment we can still the fluctuations of the mind. In Chapter 6 of *The Bhagavad Gita* we learn that "The mind is indeed restless." "But by constant practice and by freedom from passions the mind in truth can be trained".

Regarding the world of the senses, pleasure and pain, *The Bhagavad Gita* instructs us to "arise above them" and that "The man whom these cannot move, whose soul is one, beyond pleasure and pain, is worthy of life in Eternity*" 2.15*. This is essentially the message in the *Yoga Sutras* where yoga is defined as *citta vrtti nirodhah* – the cessation of movements of the consciousness and through the stilling of the mind one can find Samadhi (illumination) .

There are several lessons in *The Bhagavad Gita* that deal with the human condition and that are still relevant to us today- despite the fact that these lessons were written thousands of years ago.

"Set thy heart upon thy work, but never on its reward. Work not for a reward; but never cease to do thy work." 2.47 "Work not for the rewards or "fruits" of actions but for the "good of all the world" 3.25.

This particular message helps me in my own day to day life. There was a point where I misunderstood Yoga and felt that Yoga drew one away from work and action. I felt that the way to achieve the Yogic goals was to withdraw from society, to withdraw from action. In 3.6 we learn that Yoga is not withdrawing from society. "He who withdraws himself from actions, but ponders on their pleasures in his heart, he is under a delusion and is a false follower of the Path." Furthermore in Chapter 3.8 we learn that "Action is greater than inaction" and in 2.31 "Think thou also of thy duty and do not waver. There is no greater good for a warrior than to fight in a righteous war."

So in reading *The Bhagavad Gita* I now reflect on my own situation and attempt to fight my own righteous war. More and more I question what is my duty – what are my limitations and my attachments that are holding me back. Harder still is recognising what I'm being held back from.

The Gita teaches that we cannot escape the forces of nature. "For not even for a moment can a man be without action. Helplessly are all driven to action by the forces born of Nature." 3.5 Life is full of events and interactions – that is something we cannot escape from and so we are instructed to let our actions be pure and "free from the bonds of desire".

In a practical sense we learn to understand Nature and the Gunas. (*The Gunas are the three primary qualities of nature: Sattva (balanced and pure), Rajas (energetic and dynamic) and Tamas (dull or inert))*. When we understand the Gunas we can understand the workings of the Gunas in our own lives. "Greed, busy activity, many undertakings, unrest, the lust of desire – these arises when Rajas increases"14.12. This was one line that stood out for me from The Bhagavad Gita as I have recently come to understand my own tendencies towards a Rajasic approach to life and my undertakings.

What I mean is that I always choose to do more and more, the result being that I am always busy. When considering what I can let go of, I realise I have an attachment to the many activities and pursuits that fill up my time – so I like the message in 3.35 "And do thy duty, even if it be humble, rather than another's, even if it be great. To die in one's duty is life; to live in another's is death."

The Bhagavad Gita has lasted so long because it addresses the issues regarding the human condition. These are issues that exist regardless of time and place. Furthermore these are issues that we deal with in our day to day lives, from the most simple and mundane level to the more serious and life changing levels.

"Yoga is a harmony" 6.16 and a "perfection in whatever one does. This is the Yoga that gives peace from all pain"6.17.

I strive for that harmony and peace, the challenge of course being to find it every day. I hope that one day I can quote Arjuna "My doubts are no more, my faith is firm; and now I can say "Thy will be done""18.73

A Yoga Workshop with Birjoo Mehta

At The Iyengar Yoga Centre of Hong Kong

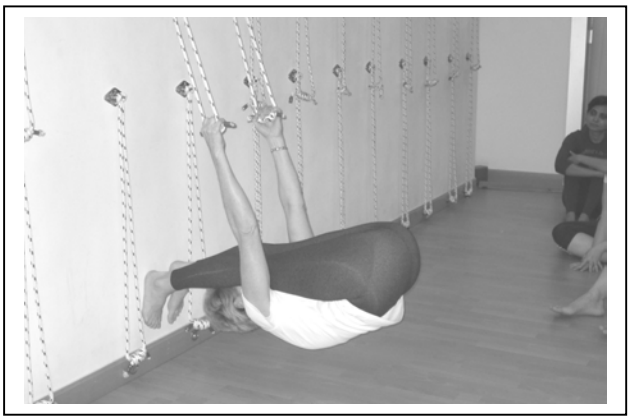
September 1 – 4, 2005

Workshop details will be posted soon

Birjoo Mehta is a lifelong student of Guruji B.K.S. Iyengar. He teaches yoga at the Iyengar Centre in Mumbai, India. This will be his second visit to teach in Hong Kong.

Check the web for further information soon!
www.iyengaryogahongkong.com

Around the Studio



The Iyengar Yoga Centre of Hong Kong

Learn the Ropes

A Yoga Workshop with Linda Shevloff

Monday, May 16 (Public holiday)
3:00 – 5:00pm
$200
Pre-register at the studio or email info@iyengaryogahongkong.com

Ty Chandler Returns to Teach in Hong Kong

The Iyengar Yoga Centre

May 22 – June 26

Ty will be teaching all of Linda's classes during this period.

Ty is a certified Junior Intermediate Iyengar teacher from Canada. Please welcome her to our Centre.

Coming Soon

New Iyengar Yoga Gear specially created for us by Hong Kong Designer Blanche Sun.

Watch for it early this summer

Teachers at this studio are Iyengar Certified or are preparing for certification exams.

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