

What is it like to attend a weekend Yoga Intensive?

Theresa Carbrey

I have attended all of the weekend workshops sponsored by Friendship Yoga, some at Prairiewoods, a residential setting and most recently in our home studio on Gilbert Court. I feel it is an opportunity to experience all of the things I like about yoga and yoga class in an expanded time zone. The senior teachers who are invited to be our instructors are longtime students of the Iyengars, going back 20-25 years. They are passionate about the subject and like all Iyengar teachers dedicated to teaching.

It was intriguing to see and hear the same pose presented by the guest teacher after learning it originally from our teacher. Subtle (and not so subtle) variations in teaching techniques, different language and emphasis help me to experience the poses with new understanding. The sessions accommodate the range of newer students and more experienced students. The ability to manage this diversity is one of the strengths of seasoned professional teachers such as Lee Sverkerson and Laurie Blakeney who have been our most recent guests. In the immersion experience of a workshop, the teacher gets to know the individual students (or will remember them from previous workshops), and almost everyone is given some new personal insight to take home with them.

There is often an overriding theme to the weekend: the individual classes are linked and refer back to each other giving the weekend a sense of cohesiveness. In some ways the sessions are somewhat less physically demanding than a regular class, as there is time for allowed for explanation, questions, and discussion. A discussion might involve the pose at hand, how it fits in with the rest of the poses in the series, and then possibly an interesting story thrown in about the teacher's experience learning this pose from the Iyengars. A workshop is also an opportunity to learn more about the cultural and philosophical origins of yoga.

I like leaving the everyday world at the door of the studio for this extended time. The sole charge: to focus on listening to the instruction and being fully present in the moment. I find the poses become old friends as I continue to study and work to develop my practice. Every bit of insight gained helps me to strengthen my resolve to stay committed to my study of yoga. When I return home after these weekends, and return to my normal life I feel like I have truly been away.

Remembering Theresa

Nancy Footner

We all experience an unusual kind of anonymity in class, as we shed our street clothes, last names, job titles, addresses, family roles, income levels, and the other conditions that serve to define us. And that anonymity prevails week to week, even though we share the same time and space with the same folks. Learning to practice yoga is about turning inward, and for a brief interval, letting go of our social selves.

In remembering Theresa Semel, everyone who was in her class at the time of her illness, can recall how liberated she seemed to feel upon entering the yoga studio. I can remember a specific instance when she returned to class after having taken a break for chemo, (she had lost her hair) and her promptly asking me whether she should wear a wig or scarf over her head. I encouraged to do whatever she wanted, and she immediately and gleefully tossed the head covering. Friendship Yoga may have been one of the few environments at that time where she could experience such tolerance and support.

With this in mind, The Board of Directors of the Maitri Yoga Education Fund, has decided that both donors to (*those who have more*) and beneficiaries of (*those who have less*) the Theresa Semel Memorial Scholarship will remain anonymous. We feel confident that Theresa would have preferred it this way.

Please consider making a donation to the Maitri Yoga Education Fund and support the Theresa Semel Memorial Scholarship

Invocation cont.

the center. Where that energy meets and from that region, (from the center of the brain), allow the brain cells to recede and be quiet in that state.

"Keep the tongue resting on the lower palate. The mouth cavity, throat, free from tension. In order to remove that tension, keep your mouth slit open as if you are going to say the prayer. A slow, soft inhalation, a slow, soft exhalation, to bring stability within yourself. Remain silent, quiet, humble from within, watching your breath before you offer your prayers."

Campbell D. [The Mozart Effect: Tapping the power of music to heal the body, strengthen the mind, and unlock the creative spirit.](#) New York, NY: Avon Books, 1997. Gass R. [Chanting: Discovering Spirit in Sound.](#) New York NY: Broadway Books, 1999.



NEWSLETTER

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Chanting the Invocation

Nancy Footner DIRECTOR, FRIENDSHIP YOGA

We have been chanting the Invocation to Patanjali at the beginning of class at Friendship Yoga for several years. I do not introduce it to Intro students, but wait until a student has moved up to Level 1, as I feel it takes a certain commitment and understanding of yoga before a student is ready to consider chanting. I always take the time to explain what the chant means both literally, symbolically, and to me personally. I also make a point of saying that this is totally optional, and if someone is not interested or comfortable with chanting that they can sit and listen. There are many healing properties associated with sound (see references below), so I know that someone who chooses to remain silent will not be unaffected, and of course sitting in *swastikasana* (legs crossed) with the hands in *namaskarasana*, (palms joined), one is practicing asana.

It took me a while to get up my nerve to introduce the Invocation, because I was unsure whether the students would take to it, whether my pronunciation was good enough, whether my voice would carry etc. In other words my insecurities were an obstacle. But after my second trip to the Iyengar Institute in December 2001, it felt so empty to begin class without the invocation that I knew I had to take the plunge. Geeta Iyengar, in an interview conducted by Margot Kitchen at the 1992 Canadian Intensive in Pune, India said this about chanting the invocation:

"We chant so that at the very beginning (of class) 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 that you are very small in front of the great soul. Once that is understood then the other problems which always arise while practicing, mainly concerned with the 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 are on the top and you know everything, than you are not a learner at all. In that sense, the chanting helps."

How you define the notion of Lord or God is your personal choice. It does not have to be about religion; it can be as simple as suspecting... believing... trusting... that there is some force out there that is bigger than you are. The Yogis believe that "divine" exists within each of us and is waiting to be liberated through our yoga practice.

Here are the typical instructions that Geeta

Any action done with beauty and purity, and in complete harmony of body, mind, and soul is art. In this way art elevates the artist. As Yoga fulfills the essential need of art, it is an art. —B.K.S. Iyengar

Join us the weekend of June 3-5, 2005, for the 7th Annual Friendship Yoga Retreat at Prairiewoods in Hiawatha, Iowa. Laurie Blakeney will be returning as our guest teacher.

Iyengar gives when preparing her class for the chant:

"Sit straight. Fold the palms in front of the chest. Bring the thumbs near the sternum bone. The bottom of your palms at the bottom of your sternum bone. Keep the chest in a lifted position. Back erect that brings the attentiveness from within. If the spine is dropped you remain in a sleepy state or a dreamy state. You are to be in a wakeful state. Lift your chest upward; lift your spine upward. Dorsal into the body and move your chest from the armpit region to the front. Keep the head in a straight position, not tilting. Close your eyes completely. Bring your eyelids down. Let the front portion of the brain remain parallel to the back of the brain. Centralise the body so that you don't tilt. Lift the trunk upward from the bottom of the spine. Keep the sides of the navel free from tension. As the eyes are closed, look within. Draw the eardrums in., the back of the eyes go in, and the eardrums go toward
Continued on back page

*Yogena cittasya padena vacam | malam sarirasya ca vaidyakena |
yopakarottam pravaram muninam | patanjalin ranajaliranato'smi | abahu
purusakaram | sankha cakrasi dharinam | sahasra sirasam svetam |
pranamami patanjalin*

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.

"In our spiritual quest, it is required of us that we develop our body in such a way that it is no longer a hindrance, but becomes our friend." B.K.S. Iyengar

A Brief Overview of the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali

(Chapters 1 & 2)

SUTRA 1.2

yoga cittavrtti nirodahah

Yoga is the ability to direct and focus mental activity. (Bouchanchaud)

Patanjali tells us that the aim of Yoga is to alleviate all suffering. This objective is delineated in chapter one, where a supreme state of existence, (God), or spiritual liberation is said to exist beyond our day to day life. Few of us will ever reach this divine state, but Patanjali states that the potential exists within each of us. To reveal this divine (and internalized) state, requires perseverance and discipline: the necessity to choose a path, (be it asana, pranayama, meditation), and commit to it, while at the same time remaining somewhat coolly detached from any outcome. It takes faith to embark on a yogic path: faith in the notion that there is a state of being that surpasses the material world of our daily existence, a world that simultaneously gives us a certain amount of pleasure, but also supports our suffering.

This divine state of being can be described as a state of mental peace. There are many obstacles in our spiritual path, “sickness, languor, doubt, indifference, laziness, sensuality, illusion, missing the point, inability to maintain progress, pain, despair, tremor of body, and irregular respiration” (Iyengar) but Patanjali also give us ways to overcome these obstacles. First we must accept that much of our suffering originates in our minds, specifically in how we perceive and interpret our lives. To be human is to encounter endless difficulties, and when we identify with these difficulties we let them become our reality.

To transcend our human state (of suffering) yoga teaches us how to discipline and focus our minds. Focusing is a process of conscious self-study. Through observation and contemplation we can penetrate to deeper layers of our selves. This process brings us mental clarity, takes us to higher levels of consciousness, and closer to the god-like state where the mind becomes pure, quiet and centered, and where the boundaries that define our normal existence, between the body and mind, between the natural and supernatural cease to exist.

SUTRA 2.16

heyam duhkhamanagatam

The pains which are yet to come, can be and are to be avoided (B.K.S. Iyengar)

The second chapter of the Yoga Sutras lays out a method to overcome our human

foibles and the suffering they cause us. Ignorance, egotism, attachments, repulsions and fear are outlined as the principle causes of our suffering; with ignorance preceding and encompassing the other causes. We most often exist in a confused state between our earthly existence and our spiritual aspirations. Controlling our minds, in the midst

Through observation and contemplation we can penetrate to deeper layers of our selves.

of this confusion and the distractions that accompany suffering is an endless challenge, but in the second chapter Patanjali tells us how to go about it. He tells us that future suffering can be avoided by following the eight limbs of yoga, (*to be discussed in a future newsletter*), which direct us in both pragmatic as well as in more ephemeral ways. In the order Patanjali presents them to us, the eight limbs guide us in our relationships to the world at large, within our personal sphere, and then if we are able, to deeper and much more subtle levels of being where worldly distractions fade and we come closer to the possibility of a true spiritual awakening.

If you are interested in exploring Yoga Philosophy, I would recommend that you begin by reading the Introduction to *Light on Yoga*. Mr. Iyengar does a brilliant job of explicating the Sutras in a coherent, readable text.

Other references I would recommend for beginners: *How to Know God, The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali* Swami Prabhavanaanda and Christopher Isherwood; *Light on Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, as interpreted by B.K.S. Iyengar; *The Essence of Yoga, Reflections on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* Bernard Bouanchaud

NANCY FOOTNER

Triangles

JEN DUTTON

On Friday mornings, after dropping my daughter Zoe off at pre-school at 8:45, I race to my Yoga class, blowing through yellow lights and mouthing curses at the slow pokes wheeling into town in Grand Torinos tuned never to exceed the speed of 40 mph. I know what my story would sound like to an arresting officer. “But think, just think, what my road rage would be like if I didn’t make it to Yoga.” I rationalize to myself as I bump over the curb and nab the last parking space in the lot. And it does seem somehow that as earth mother, wife, yoga student, I ought to be more blessed out.

In class I have time to contemplate my many-sided hypocritical self while following the first poses. I assume Utthita Trikonasana a.k.a. extended triangle pose, as the real work of the hour begins. My stressed out energy hangs with me and so does a deep need to succeed, to ace this moment, knock it out of the

ballpark, and vindicate myself for all those times during the previous days I have been half paying attention or wanting to escape the many things life demands. Utthita Trikonasana gives me a lot to think about. The body splits into several planes, one leg rotated perpendicular to the body, the other forward facing, the arms reaching both skyward and earthward at the same time and the torso stretching ninety degrees from the floor. Holding the entire geometrical equation in my head is challenging.

Whenever I practice Utthita Trikonasana, I think of Picasso, and the painting “Woman in a Corset.” We have a print of this painting hanging in our bedroom, and though I have always thought Picasso a little too mathematical, familiarity has begun to do its work on me. Obviously, Picasso was interested in planar relationships, and this is some of the passion behind “Woman” and Cubism in general. In order to really “see” the painting, I have to do some dimensional filling in, organize three planes on the flat canvas in my one dimensional brain. Looking at “Woman” every day has helped me unfold it a little, in the

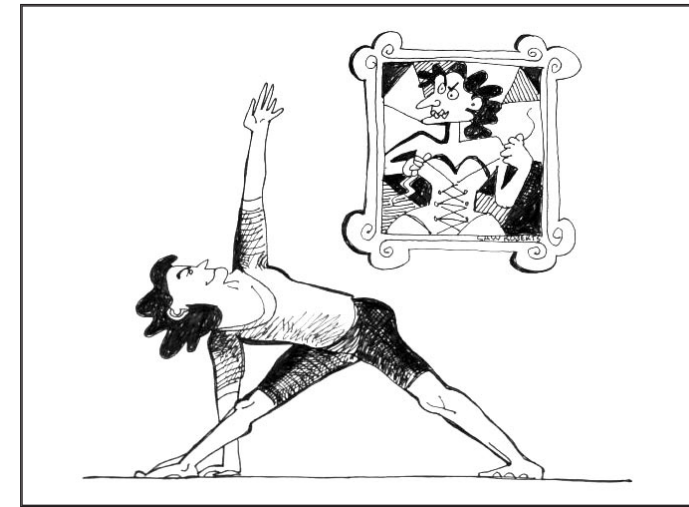
way a single glance in an art book or a browse through a museum wouldn’t. This difference between a meditation on the artistry and a mere appreciation of it helps me understand how Yoga too can be a profoundly deep experience to those who can submerge themselves in it fully.

The unfolding I encounter in Utthita Trikonasana starts in the pelvis. I open there and then stretch again along my spine, trying not to crowd my neck with my shoulders.

The extension of my arms is less natural, partially because my over eager shoulders get in the way, and because I am only just beginning to understand how to rotate my rib cage so that I can comfortably look up toward the ceiling. I like the feeling of this conscious self dividing, because I feel it represents the real me, moving in three directions at once. I am conscious that my fierce morning

triangle is in opposition to the quietness of Yoga as a physical and mental activity and I wonder sometimes if my internal quivering is going to cause some kind of accident in the studio, bricks to rattle down from the shelf or pictures to come un-sprung from their wires. I worry that I won’t get the solution to the equation that the asana represents, and then of course I don’t, because that’s just the way it is.

My husband often jokes as I come home after class describing my pugilistic battle with this or that part of my anatomy, that he’s going to report me to my teacher for having too much attitude. Yet honestly, I am grateful to feel this way, grateful to feel the fire in my belly, and grateful again as it slowly diffuses and we return to Tadasana, a single upright plane which makes much more sense. I only catch a wave of oneness for a half millisecond, but it’s an eternity. It’s my whole life whether I am yin or yang or neither, and all of it, all of it, floats away, and then comes back to me, the sharp edges still glittering.



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