



N E W S L E T T E R

Fall-Winter • 2007/8

“After all, the goal of yoga may be ultimate freedom, but even before this is achieved, there is an incremental experience of greater freedom as we discover ever more self-control, sensitivity, and awareness that permits us to live the life we aspire to, one of decency; clean honest human relations; goodwill and fellowship; trust; self-reliance; joy in the fortune of others; and equanimity in the face of our own misfortune.”

— BKS Iyengar, *Light on Life*

From the Director....

“IN THE STRUGGLE ALONE THERE IS KNOWLEDGE”

— B.K.S. IYENGAR

“Plateau-ing” seems to be an inevitable stage that is integral to any kind of transformational process. A plateau can rise up in the landscape and seem to go on forever, no ups, no downs just a level surface. At first this can seem o.k., no unfamiliar bumps or unexpected slopes, but then after a while if what you are looking forward to is CHANGE! GROWTH! and PROGRESS!, it can be frustrating, and then maddening and can even lead to a peculiar despondency.

I have observed over the past 15 years of teaching that if the student goes beyond the Intro level, then they have been “hooked”. It could be physical: some relief from the stiffness that can cause discomfort and

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pain, or perhaps an appreciation of how yoga “strength” is about subtlety and refinement. It could be emotional: a way to manage the stresses of life that can cause pain and sorrow. It could be mental: an awareness that learning to focus on the details of the postures quiets and clears the mind so that it can be directed more constructively.

Staying enthused can last for some forever, but for many somewhere between year 1 and 2, the faith begins to be tested. Geeta Iyengar has stated that it takes a lot of “donkey work”, a strong will and self-discipline to get through the physical stiffness, weakness, and mental resistance that most of us bring to the mat. In all honesty, I have to confess that in my early years as a student I did quit a number of

times. The challenges that I face will never be easy to resolve. I would get discouraged and give up, but eventually I would find my way back to the path, simply because my body (and my mind) demand that I persist.

If you feel yourself “on a plateau” and getting discouraged, I strongly urge you to seek counsel with a more experienced student, or a teacher because I can guarantee that they have been there too. Sometimes taking a private lesson can bring some new understanding that hasn’t come to you in class and re-invigorate your studies, or making a date to practice with another student may give you the boost you need to keep going.

Study the literature. I would recommend starting with *Light on Life*, Mr. Iyengar’s most recent book, as it is such an accessible and personal account of his lifelong, uninterrupted practice. (He started at age 15 and will be celebrating his 89th birthday on December 14th). Mr. Iyengar has been very honest in his writings about his humble and improbable beginnings, his ups and downs. Reading his story will expand your understanding of Yoga, and help you find a renewed purpose and meaning, so that you will be able to circumvent the inevitable setbacks and frustrations, and perhaps even gain some insight as to what really causes them.

Save this weekend for a retreat!

May 30 – June 1, 2008

Annual Friendship Yoga Retreat at Prairiewoods
with guest teacher Mary Obendorfer.

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STANDING STILL

STORY | Jen Dutton

ILLUSTRATION | Connie Roberts

One of the things I like about the study of Yoga is the feeling that I am continuing to learn and that the path that I am on is limitless. As a restless and commitment phobic person, open-endedness makes me feel safe and its opposite gives me uncomfortable heeby-jeebies. For example, the other day, on my way to the recycling center to drop off some boxes from our recent move to Garrettsville, Ohio, I passed the local cemetery. The reality that Garrettsville might be where I live out my life made me break out in sweats.

It's not that I don't like Garrettsville, I do. It boasts a population of roughly two thousand people and I haven't met any that didn't grow up here or live the majority of their life in a neighboring town. These people are not backwards, or lacking in ambition. The majority seem happy, which in my experience is rare. So why am I so shaken at the prospect of becoming one of them?

One reason may be that for the last ten years my husband and I have done nothing but work toward the next thing, in the process perhaps also forgetting to appreciate what we had in the moment. I don't think moving to Garrettsville means an end to our ambition, but for the sake of our children, we would like to put down roots and grow like trees. Not every challenge requires great effort. Some of the most challenging things entail patience and durability and the strength to hold fast.

A Yoga asana like *Tadasana* is difficult because it is simple. Most of us learn to stand at the age of nine months and do not give much thought to how we do it after that.

When I practice *Tadasana*, I concentrate on the strength and alignment of a number of muscles that want to slough off into their usual mode of doing things. The asana, at first, is familiar and dull in the way of small town living. My brain sits on its porch noticing but not really paying attention to those crazy off center feet. Oh, here comes Lazy Knees. He hasn't mowed his lawn.

The comfort level fades as conscious thoughts intensify. Suddenly, there are mysteries, maybe even drama. I am not just standing still. If I want to stay in the game, I have to move my thighs deeper into my hip sockets roll my shoulder bones back and extend my spine. The place I am in loses its sense of stagnation as the connection between me, the outsider, and all those familiar body parts increase. I am drawn into the flow by the focus I must muster. Now holding still is not a reflex but a difficult complex action.

Every time I take a yoga class, there is a part of me that would rather move beyond *Tadasana* and get to



Not every challenge requires great effort. Some of the most challenging things entail patience and durability and the strength to hold fast.

the cool stuff like backbends and headstands, but I have to remain and become a part of the neighborhood. The stillness contains vertiginous motion, terrifying in the beginning, then familiar in a way that allows tendrils of affection to grow and relationships to be deepened. That lady across the street knows something about azaleas I don't. One day, I may be buried in the Garrettsville cemetery, but in the meantime there is a world of life here, a world that I have only to steady myself to see.

Editors note: Jen would love to hear from her Friendship Yoga friends. She can be reached at jdutton42@gmail.com.

Today was a great day –

STORY | Jane Chalmers

for the first time in 6 months I could feel my little toes touching the yoga mat!

Although my hands and feet still alternate between numbness and pain, I can feel the wonderful benefits of yoga coming through them. After several years of working too hard and not focusing enough on myself (as most young mothers do), my recent cancer has actually rejuvenated my interest in yoga. The discipline and focus that I learnt as a young Iyengar and meditation student in Australia came back to help me when I needed it: during my diagnosis, surgery, and recovery. Yoga and meditation reduced my anxiety and helped me live in the moment, especially the good moments! My practice helped me live with chemotherapy's side effects, especially the neuropathy in my hands and feet.

I started Iyengar yoga when I was 13, (the same year I became a vegetarian), when a friend's mum started a class for us after school. Yoga has helped me through high school, dental school, a Masters degree, a PhD and childbirth, but having young children didn't leave me much time to devote to yoga practice and it slipped away from me. After my cancer diagnosis, with encouragement from my mum and my mother-in-law, (a caring and great yoga teacher in Adelaide), I sought out Yoga classes

again. How wonderful to find Friendship Yoga here in Iowa City.

Yoga helped me even when my energy was at its lowest and the chemo side effects were terrible. Lying flat on a bed or in hospital I could still meditate while tests were being done or while I felt sick or in pain. My family sent me inspiring yoga books and CDs to use when I was bedridden. I could still move my feet and limbs and do the smallest parts of asanas. This led to some private sessions with Nancy, as I didn't have the strength or energy to get through a whole class. What a wonderful moment to be able to actually do a shoulder-stand again, and even better to rediscover the benefits of the asanas: a renewed sense of identity, vigor, and composure. This has been so healing for me.

Yoga has made my body feel good even in some small way, when all it was otherwise feeling was pain and illness. So I knew my body could and would heal and I would feel good and strong again, which thankfully I do now. Yoga has helped me to bond with the important women in my life, even though they are half a world away in Australia – I know how yoga has helped them and how they in turn have helped others with



Jane Chalmers with her kids, Ryan and Wade.

yoga. Yoga helps me to bond with my sons; they love the kids' classes with their friends here in Iowa City and we have a yoga room that we have great fun in at home before bedtime. They love to lead the asanas and relaxation. Yoga helps my boys bond with their grandmothers who are so far away. Now in our future visits we will all get to do a dog pose or the triangle with Nonna or Nan!

Thanks for all the great energy that the students generate at Friendship Yoga.

Flash! Sutras class in the making

Fred Smith, Sanskrit scholar and professor of religious studies is considering offering a Yoga Philosophy class in 2008 for Friendship Yoga students. Here are his thoughts so far. "Let's see - hmmm. In such a class I would want to teach not just chanting of the sutras, but what the Yoga Sutras are, and perhaps go through them one by one, maybe a couple of sutras each time, giving a bit of history, context, philosophy, and the religious or spiritual uses to which they were put. I

would draw from Sanskrit commentaries and from the work of modern scholars and practitioners. I would ask the students to read a few things, including BKS Iyengar's LOYS work - but it is important to note that I would not limit my interpretations simply to discussing his views. I know him well enough to say confidently that he would not want a YS class to be limited in this way."

Let us know if you are interested.

Dear Friends of Friendship Yoga:

Most of us who have been hanging around Iowa City for a long time have a number of reasons why we like it here. Along with the many fun and interesting things to do and the opportunities for self-improvement, we should add one more: Iowa City is the only city or town in the state of Iowa that has a certified Iyengar Yoga instructor, Nancy Footner. Some of us are better yogis than others, but all of us are better in mind and body because of her commitment to Iyengar Yoga and her dedication to teaching a body of knowledge that is both ancient and relevant.

Four years ago with a gift from a friend of Theresa Semel and in memory of Theresa's devotion to yoga, the Maitri Yoga Education Fund was established. Through this fund we are able to provide financial support for students to attend the yoga workshops that are sponsored twice a year by Friendship Yoga. These workshops bring in from out of state, dedicated and highly experienced yoga teachers, all of whom have studied in India with the Iyengars. It is akin to professional development for us all.

Even though the registration fee for the workshops is modest, some students simply could not attend without some financial assistance. These are learning intensives and the students who attend are serious and committed students. Your financial support of these worthy students would allow the Maitri Yoga Education Fund to fulfill its mission. Please join us in our support of this endeavor.

MYEF Board Members:
Judy Hendershot
Barb Yerkes
Kevin Berbaum
Cheryl Hetherington
Craig Willis

Special Benefit Class for the Maitri Yoga Education Fund (MYEF)

New Year's Day, January 1, 2008

9:30 - 11:30 a.m.

Open to all levels

Brunch to follow

Suggested donation \$25

RSVP nfootner@avalon.net

All are welcome!

**Love begets courage.
Moderation creates abundance.
Humility generates power.**

— B.K.S. IYENGAR, *LIGHT ON YOGA*

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Another book I would recommend is the *The Tree of Yoga*, a collection of short essays that were in their original form lectures and talks Mr. Iyengar had given to his students prior to 1988 when he was traveling worldwide extensively.

The Introductory chapter of *Light on Yoga* also gives a short, coherent summary of Yoga philosophy. From there you can begin to study the Mr Iyengar's more expansive interpretation, the *Light on Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. I have found a good companion to **LOYS** is another interpretation of the sutras by Bernard Bouanchaud, *Essence of Yoga*. What I like about Bouanchaud's text is that it provides themes for personal reflection, a sort of how to, hands on approach.

See the asanas as tools for understanding yourself: your physical self, your emotional self, your intellectual self. Try not to get distracted by the media blitz about yoga. (You will probably never make the cover of *Yoga Journal*!) Instead see your practice as an opportunity to probe and penetrate inward to a deeper sense of Self. Appreciate the subtlety and the changes that come slowly over time. Be patient and keep practicing.



Please make your check payable to the Maitri Yoga Education Fund and send to 1231 Gilbert Court, Iowa City, Iowa 52240.

Name _____ Date _____

Address _____

Telephone/email _____ Amount _____

Please specify if you would like your donation to be reserved for the Theresa Semel Scholarship Fund.