



N E W S L E T T E R

Winter 2008

Through cultivation of friendliness, compassion, joy, and indifference to pleasure and pain, virtue and vice respectively, the consciousness becomes favorably disposed, serene and benevolent.

Sutra 1.33—Light on Yoga Sutras of Patanjali

New Year's Day Benefit Class for the Maitri Yoga Education Fund

Jan. 1, 2009

9:30-11 a.m

Potluck brunch to follow class.

\$25 donation requested.

Save this weekend:

May 29-31, 2009

11th Annual Prairiewoods Retreat

Guest Teacher: Eddy Marks

Co-director, B.K.S. Iyengar Centers

of San Diego

(Mary O's husband)

From the Director....

NANCY FOOTNER

Director, Friendship Yoga

Certified Iyengar Yoga Instructor

On December 14, 2008 there will be an worldwide celebration of the 90th birthday of B.K.S. Iyengar. Mr. Iyengar stands alone in his dedication to his practice (still many hours per day), to his scholarly work, and to his teaching. I strongly recommend that you read his most recent book, **Light on Life**, (now available in paperback!) in order to appreciate both the longevity of his path as a practitioner, the depth of his studies as a scholar, and the breadth of his influence as a teacher.

Guriji, (as he is affectionately and respectfully called by his students), is also now very involved in leaving as his legacy the modernization of his birthplace Bellur, which only a few years ago was still a very primitive village. With his own funds, and with donations from his students he has overseen the building of schools, the establishment of a safe water system, the beginnings of industry and many other changes. At his invitation, many of his longtime students, will be traveling to visit Bellur with Guruji as their tour guide during his birthday celebration in mid-December.

Widely recognized for its therapeutic benefits, Iyengar Yoga also remains rooted in the profundity of the ancient sages. I urge you to study the **Light on Yoga Sutras of Patanjali** for Mr. Iyengar's insights into the philosophy of Yoga, or better yet join our ongoing sutras class, which meets irregularly on Sunday mornings with Professor Fred Smith, Sanskrit scholar, University of Iowa professor, and a longtime Iyengar yoga student.

Most of us enter a yoga class seeking to find greater *ease* with our body; hoping to become more pliable, strong, and resilient. What a bonus to discover that we leave class feeling greater *ease* in our minds: calmer, more clear-headed, and positive. We all find out pretty quickly that you can't be an Iyengar yoga student and check your brain at the door. Listening to instructions, observing and replicating the actions of a demonstration, paying attention to the details of alignment, we simply must let go of everything that is extraneous to the task at hand. We become focused. We clear our minds. We are renewed.

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B.K.S. Iyengar in Eka Pada Viparita Dandasana II.

Friendship Yoga is 15 years old !!!!

It seems like only yesterday that I wrote a column headed "Friendship Yoga is 11 years old." I won't review how "it came to be," but those of you who are interested can check back into the archives on www.friendshipyoga.com for the Winter 2004 issue.

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The Home (or Ho-hum) Practice

STORY | Jen Dutton

ILLUSTRATION | Connie Roberts

It isn't just the accent in Ohio. I've started calling the yoga I've been doing on a daily basis my "ho-hum" practice. I've yet to find anything too exciting about it. I became obsessive last fall and let everything drop away but my writing, laundry, dishwashing, and child care. The only Iyengar Yoga Studio I could find was 45 minutes away so after Christmas, I ordered Silva, Mira and Shyam Mehta's book "Yoga the Iyengar Way" from Amazon and paged the back for lessons. Before I started, I wasn't bathing regularly, and aside from my family and the two women I met every morning at the bus stop with my daughter Zoe, I was having little or no contact with the world. If I had another job, people would have described me as depressed, but because I was an "artist," I got away with being reclusive, odd, smelly, and in a lousy mental state.

I obsessed about my writing because moving from Iowa City had stripped me of sustaining friendships and routines and I was feeling empty. I don't consider being an "artist" a special designation. The creative energy is in everything we do and I was using it self-destructively, over reaching the best parts of myself in order to validate something in my ego. The tortured artist is a glamorous, but useless chimera. Yet there I was hungering for a straight up martini at the end of every night and feeling like nobody understood me.

I had to remind myself, eventually, after an extended feeling of blackness and the sense that my emotional absence was hurting my family life, that I was better off sane, counting my blessings, and keeping myself in good physical and mental health. The news was the sort of one delivers to oneself during low times that seems obvious on the surface, but can take a leap of faith to put into affect. I plugged in a few DVD's and video tapes, and for a while I let Rodney Yee, Patricia Walden and Suzanne Deason yammer at me about how to achieve a suppler but stronger spiritual life and body. Their friendliness and their will to do good was worth paying attention to, but they also attracted my children who wanted to do yoga on top of me, a game of full contact stretching that was not as healthful or reflective as I hoped.

A few more weeks passed and I moved on from the tapes (which grow old—I'm not sure why) to Sessions One through Four of the Mehta's book, practicing *Tadasana*, *Trikonasana*, *Parsva Konasana*,



Virhabdrasana I, for the six-hundredth thousandth time, not that much different from the cycle I did in my first classes at Friendship Yoga, only stiffer, lonelier, crabbier.

Uttanasana was particularly hilarious. Where once were my toes are now my knees. As dull as these old struggles were, though, they rooted me and reminded me that boredom was not the evil I believed it to be. Low stimulation can be a room of one's own, a quiet place where nothing matters but the ticking of the clock and one's attachment to the planet. I have had the good fortune to be bored through long periods of my life and though I ached and chafed because I yearned for more, more, more in my very American way, I discovered that what is here, has always been here, that cold rainy days inside are not a curse, that probably no one gets remembered in the vastness of time, but that does not make us any less a part of a greater whole. Going back to what was familiar and discovering the flickers of self-belief, glimpsing the deeper more abiding me that arose out of the patterns and well trod paths of a few yesterdays ago felt good. I followed the routine, did the work, and slowly, the river melted.

Jen Dutton, a student of Friendship Yoga until 2007, now lives in Ohio. Her first book, Freaked, is due out from HarperTeen on March 17, 2009.

This essay is excerpted from Eve Adamson's *Hungry Yogi* blog, posted on March 7, 2008. As of this fall, Eve has been an Iyengar yoga student at Friendship Yoga for 2 years. Find out more about Eve and her writing at www.eveadamson.com.

Sirsasana, No Wall Necessary Thanks!

Last week in yoga class, when I set up to do headstand against the wall in my usual way, Nancy said, "Eve, I think you are ready to move away from the wall next week. "Yikes! Really?" I was feeling all tippy that day, but felt encouraged that she wanted me to move towards balancing independently. I vowed to practice all week, just to be ready.

The next day, I tried to practice at home, and found I couldn't balance for more than a second, when I've been able to do headstand in the middle of the room alone at home (with nobody watching) without a problem before. Somehow, the teacher's assertion that I was ready to do this in public made me completely unable to do it at all. I fell (feet thudding ungracefully on the couch cushions) over and over. Frustrated, I stopped practicing. Clearly I didn't have the necessary inner rod of quiet. I wasn't rooted to the earth by the crown of my head, or by anything else. I was *flighty*. Unbalanced, in every way.

A week had rolled by and it was Friday morning again. Just ten minutes into class, my teacher said, "Everybody set up for *sirsasana*."

I felt the butterflies rustle up into my throat, but also a surge of courage.

"In...the middle of the room. Right?" I asked.

"Yes!" she said, with no knowledge of my abysmal failure in my home practice. "Do you know how to fall?"

Do I.

Actually, I have read all about how to fall, in Mr. Iyengar's book, *Light on*

Yoga. He explains how, if one is to fall forward, one must unlace the fingers quickly, or risk crunching them (he doesn't put it quite like that, but you get the idea). A few months ago, I practiced this over and over again, so I would know how to fall. Once, I panicked, forgetting, and did indeed crunch my fingers. Ouch.

But today, I was determined to do it. *I'll err on the side of tipping back in the safe direction*, I thought. I came up slowly, carefully, and calmly. Most notably, I did feel calm and quiet inside. I even felt rooted--if not too deeply--by the crown of my head. Up I came, and stayed...and stayed...and stayed! I wasn't wobbling or wavering or feeling unbalanced at all. Not one bit.

Well...not until Nancy noticed me and started encouraging me to rotate my thighs inward. This slight adjustment did throw me off just a little. I lost my inner calm and I did get tippy, but then I came down gracefully the right way, not the finger-crunching forward-falling way.

Later, we did some more advanced poses we hadn't done in class before, including padmasana. I'm very flexible, if not very strong or balanced, so this isn't a difficult pose for me. But then when she had us move into simhasana (lion pose), which culminates with opening the mouth wide and sticking out our tongues, I felt strong and powerful, like I was sticking out my tongue at everything in my life that wasn't going the right way. Blah to you, wrong ideas! Blah to you, doubt and fear! Blah, blah, blah!

The experience got me thinking about

STORY | Eve Adamson

what it means to be balanced on some days, and unbalanced on other days. Strong and rooted sometimes, and sometimes, weak and wavering. While progress happens, it is more often a circuitous progress, curving in and over and back on itself so that it can seem more like a scenic route than a road that actually goes anywhere.

Maybe that's just fine.

I enjoyed this rigorous class, and that early-in-the-session *sirsasana* success helped fuel the rest of my poses.

It's nice when a little breakthrough moves one along the path in a more forward direction for a little while. It's certain to wind back around again to a place you thought you'd already passed forever, but that's all part of the process, I guess. Every victory is only a victory of a moment, but the same holds true with every failure. To fail, to fall over, to crunch the fingers or have a tippy day, is only a detour. Sooner or later, the path meanders forward again, despite all the chicanes and backtracks. At some point, every yoga student is bound to look back and think, "Wow. Look how far I've come. And I didn't think I was getting anywhere."

Tonight, maybe I'll work on getting into handstand by kicking up with the *left* leg. I still haven't been able to do that even once, but maybe tonight it will happen. I'm feeling pretty strong.

from page one

I don't know anyone who doesn't on occasion feel frustrated, discouraged or even fearful when practicing. These feelings come up and have to be faced. That is why Mr. Iyengar invented all the props that we have come to depend on. He saw how blocks or chairs could allow a stiff student to approximate the classic poses, while still working safely within their limits. He saw that ropes could allow a weaker student to stay in an inverted

posture for a longer period and then begin to experience the benefits of being upside down.

Follow his lead and consider your yoga mat to be part science lab and part art studio. View your practice as a research project, and recognize your role as the primary investigator. See the challenges you face in every yoga asana as an opportunity to be a creative problem solver. Recognize and be grateful for the subtle

and not so subtle changes that happen over time and on all levels. Seek to unite your body, your mind, and your intelligence with the greater depth of your soul.

Namaste

"As the essence of the tree is contained in the fruit, so too the essence of your practice is contained in its fruit of freedom, poise, peace, and beatitude."

BKS Iyengar *Tree of Yoga*

My Home Practice

STORY | Elyse Miller
ILLUSTRATION | Connie Roberts

"I should practice yoga," I think, when I get home from work. I've been practicing yoga at home for a long time. But a home practice, well, that's seems a whole different construct. One that requires a designated spot in my house, with props, and time to use them. So I have the spot and the props. I look through *Light on Yoga*, attempt to use the index, flip back and forth through the text, and create a series of postures that seem appropriate for the me that's there right now. Only now it's time to feed the dogs.

Maxine, the black standard poodle, is a slow eater. Gloria, the brown standard poodle, is a fast eater. I have been trained to body block Gloria so that she doesn't have her way with Maxine's food. Twice a day. But Gloria doesn't know I'm body blocking her. She just knows that I'm at her side, heels together, squatting (in *malasana*). And then I slowly raise my hips and lower my head (into *utanasana*). Gloria is still just happy to be by my side. And then I sit on the floor, with my legs wide apart, Gloria in front of me, and I move (into *upavistha konasana*), concentrating



on keeping my thighs in the correct place and Gloria out of Maxine's bowl.

And then the moment to do yoga after work has gone. I don't want my home practice to turn into a should. Shoulds feel judgmental and authoritative. The Compact Oxford English Dictionary states that should is, "1- used to indicate obligation, duty, or correctness," and "2- used to indi-

cate what is probable."

Am I obliged to have a home practice? Is it probable that I will practice when I get home from work tonight? Well, I should. But what I've discovered is that practice doesn't have to look like a room with props at a special time each day. Practice has to do with intention. And home is me, no matter where I am.

Maitri is the Sanskrit word for Friendship

Since its inception in 2004, more than twenty Friendship Yoga students have received scholarship assistance enabling them to attend retreats, workshops and classes, which they otherwise could not have afforded. Please be a "friend" and make a donation to the Maitri Yoga Education Fund.



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

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