



N E W S L E T T E R

Winter 2009

"If the practitioner weighs the front, back, and side torso with equidistance to the core of the being, along with parallel adjustments of the spinal muscles, shoulder-blades, muscles of the arms, grips of the wrists, and legs. I say he is close to the **ananta samapatti**, i.e. embracing the Soul evenly from all sides of the body, directing toward the Soul as if all parts of the body are completely mingled to the core."

**BKS Iyengar, Yoga Wisdom and Practice p.20**

**Spread the word!...  
about Iyengar Yoga**

Bring a friend to one of the free classes in Jan. 2010.  
Visit [www.friendshipyoga.com](http://www.friendshipyoga.com) for schedule of free classes.

**Save this weekend:**

**May 21-24, 2010**

Friendship Yoga Annual  
Spring Retreat at Prairiewoods  
With Guest Senior Certified  
Iyengar Yoga Teacher:  
Eddy Marks

# From the Director....

NANCY FOOTNER Director, Friendship Yoga  
Certified Iyengar Yoga Instructor



B.K.S. Iyengar in Dhanurasana.

Another year comes to an end. On December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2009 B.K.S. Iyengar (Guruji), his family and his students all over the world will celebrate his 91<sup>st</sup> birthday. I wish to express my personal gratitude to Mr. Iyengar for his lifelong devotion to his practice, his teaching and to his students. Recently I was amazed to learn that Guruji traveled to Russia in April 2009, where there is a budding Iyengar Yoga community and where he had never before visited. To my mind, his willingness to overcome the barrier of age, distance, language, and culture to personally meet with a new community of primarily beginning students was an act of pure generosity and love.

Anyone who comes to Iyengar Yoga, and makes a commitment to practice comes to discover a unique path to improved health, mental stability, and an expanded awareness. As Iyengar Yoga students we are indebted to Mr. Iyengar for the uncompromising precision, depth, and comprehensiveness of his work. If you are a new student, I highly recommend that you obtain a copy

of *Light on Life*, Guruji's most recent book (now in paperback), which is a very personal and engaging account of his life and his work. I guarantee you will find it inspiring.

As Iyengar yoga students we appreciate that each instruction, correction, and adjustment a teacher gives us is directing not only our bodies toward more precise alignment, enhanced flexibility, and greater strength, but directing our minds concurrently to be more focused, more sensitive, more reflective. How wonderful it is to come to find through our personal practice a way to free our selves from the constant assault of life's stressors and distractions. With B.K.S. Iyengar as your inspiration, I encourage you to stay motivated and disciplined; to seek out the potential within your self to grow, to change, and to find meaning at any age and for a lifetime.

Thanks to all of you for your interest in Iyengar Yoga and for your support of Friendship Yoga.

Namaste.  
Nancy

**"In order to unite  
the mind with  
the soul, the body,  
which is the  
foundation has to  
be kept healthy."**

YOGA WISDOM AND PRACTICE

## Film Screening: *Atma Darsana*

Come join us for a showing of *Atma Darsana* (a film about BKS Iyengar) at the Iowa City Public Library, Meeting Room A on Sunday January 31<sup>st</sup> at 1pm. All are welcome to attend.

1231 Gilbert Court, Iowa City, 319-338-2674  
[www.friendshipyoga.com](http://www.friendshipyoga.com)

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Towering 19,340 feet above the Serengeti, the climb itself would take us 7 days and would reach altitudes never experienced by this resident “flatlander”.

STORY | Steve Bender  
PHOTO |

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## Trikonasana at the Top

**“Yoga starts from the health of the body and makes one climb the Everest of spiritual contentment, poise, and peace.”**

YOGA WISDOM AND  
PRACTICE P.205

*The air is crisp and cold and the only sound is that of frozen scree being crushed beneath the soles of my hiking boots. The horizon is just beginning to display the soft glow of sunrise as the beam of my headlamp illuminates the volcanic rocks before me. Only 850 feet to go. Each ascending step is as if in slow motion and each breath deep and labored. The cold penetrates my gloves and boots, but I focus on the goal ahead. Not far now, the conquest is within reach.....*

I've always been an adventurous soul. Growing up I loved to accompany my dad on hunting and fishing trips and reveled in our family camping vacations. I learned the ways of the outdoors and enjoyed the challenges of “man vs. nature”. I also inherited a yearn to travel. The thrill of seeing some new place and new peoples fascinates me to this day. Over the years, I've developed sort of a “bucket list”, if you will, of places and things I'd like to see or do. My excuse to actually do them, began several years ago when I came up with the idea to reward myself each year with a birthday present of one of the things on my list. Climbing in the Himalaya Mountains of Nepal, hiking the Milford Trek in New Zealand, plying the reaches of the Amazon River and tramping the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu are but a few of my past adventures. All have been wonderful experiences

This year, however, I was to reach a milestone in my life. My 60<sup>th</sup> birthday! Not really that different from any other birthday, yet it did seem to warrant a unique reward. A passing discussion with a friend and fellow dentist at the

College of Dentistry who shares my adventurous spirit, solidified my choice for this momentous occasion. The two of us would attempt to summit Mt. Kilimanjaro, the highest free-standing peak in Africa. Now I'm no stranger to mountains, and have climbed up and upon many of them over the years, but this would be far and away the most challenging. Towering 19,340 feet above the Serengeti, the climb itself would take us 7 days and would reach altitudes never experienced by this resident “flatlander”.

The pre-trip literature as well as the pre-climb briefing outlined several things we could expect on the climb. Temperatures could reach below 0 degrees. Winds could be relentless. Breathing would be difficult. Some days would begin before sunrise and entail 8-9 hours of climbing. Parts of the climb would require intense mental concentration as well as physical stamina. Not everyone makes it. So to sum things up, it's going to be cold, miserable, physically trying, mentally exhausting and on top of all that I might not make it! I can still see Sue, shaking her head and saying, “and you're doing this, why?”

Contrary to what many of you may think, mountain climbing isn't always done with ropes and carabiners and technical “stuff”. Many major peaks can be reached without the aid of complicated gear. Mt. Kilimanjaro is one of them. We were required not only to hike, but climb hand over hand and scramble at times over boulders and around rock outcroppings, cut footholds in ice and snow, traverse open rock faces, all with the accompanying risks that go along with this kind of endeavor. Muscle strength,

balance, flexibility and mental toughness were all required to insure our success. Let me state this another way that will make this story fit for inclusion in a yoga newsletter. Muscle strength = Yoga ; Balance and body control = Yoga ; Flexibility = Yoga ; and Mental Toughness = Yoga! And the great thing is that since the above are all essentials in sports, the result is improved athletic performance. I've experienced these benefits many times before when hiking and climbing in challenging terrain and they were invaluable in the success of my climb up "Kili". I probably could have done it without the benefit of yoga, but yoga just made it so much easier. While some of my climbing partners were struggling with the physical challenges in our path, I was having a relatively easy time of it due to not only excellent cardio-vascular fitness, but most importantly the unique benefits that only a yoga practice can provide.

*...as I slowly move from rock to rock, I "feel" the rock beneath my foot even through the sole of my boot. My toes spread wide as they grip the rock and allow me to balance for just a moment, like in Vrksasana. I plant my other foot and stretch way to the right, as in Utthita Parsvakonasana, looking for a secure hand hold. I balance again, if only for a split second, then stretch forward as in Virabhadrasana II, seeking the security of the next rock in my path. This pattern is repeated over and over, breathing between moves, another step, then rest, another foothold, rest. Progress is slow but deliberate and requires intense concentration to avoid a misstep that might precipitate a fall. My body repeatedly calls upon the legions of small stabilizer muscles, honed by asana practice, to maintain my balance and move cat-like from perch to perch. At last, 8:00 am, February 1, 2009, Super Bowl Sunday, after seven challenging but glorious days, the victory is mine. I stand atop the mountain basking in the early morning sun, exhilarated by my conquest and the vista before me. High above the clouds I take a quiet moment to spread some of my father's ashes as a memorial to my greatest mentor; then slowly move to strike my celebratory pose.....Trikonasana at the Top!*

PS: A special thanks to: Nancy for her dedication and patience with this somewhat flexibility challenged student. To my wife, Sue, for her continued reminders to do my asana practice. And to John Capouya's book, Real Men Do Yoga, that convinced me to "get with the program"!

**Editor's note:** Due to space limitations we had to edit the details of Steve's pre-climb training regimen. Suffice to say it was rigorous, and intense!

# Aspiring to Teach

By Jenn Bowen

I've been intrigued by Iyengar yoga since my very first class in 1999 when it seemed as if every instruction from the teacher pertained precisely to me alone. Over the years I grew fascinated at how subtle physical adjustments in poses made huge transformations both internally within the body and externally within the pose. Then other benefits began to come along in beautiful gradual waves. First increased body awareness, then strength, increasing flexibility. A little while later, snippets of serenity and clarity joined more strength, more flexibility.

After studying at Friendship Yoga for several years, I felt drawn to the next step within this method, to attend higher level workshops and trainings and to study with senior teachers. Receiving exposure to the wisdom of a lineage of teachers is an indescribable honor. As I shift from student to teacher, and back again, I encounter the richness of this subject in its seemingly endless layers, from the gross physical and physiological levels to the subtle emotional and spiritual levels. With each passing year I continue to discover Iyengar yoga remains an inexhaustible subject, one of constant refinement and improvement.

In aspiring to teach I've appreciated the Iyengar method's focus on the base of each pose to provide a strong foundation. I've learned to apply this sentiment into my life in endless forms. Normally when something begins to go wrong in life, the instinct arises to fix the predicament –Quick! Sharply veer back on course! In yoga, however, we look to the source to correct a surfacing problem, not treat the symptom. Oh it's my back foot which has lost its connection to the floor, and clearly why my pose has collapsed. This way of seeing becomes invaluable in life as we retrace our actions to remedy life's pitfalls. If we practice this with regularity we start to bring awareness to our tendencies to go off track and learn to prevent life's ills before they begin.

Today we commonly hear and know of people in search for release from physical and emotional pain. As a study of oneself, yoga asks us to go inward and listen to the body. Although not an easy task, by delving into oneself, we can look at the many layers of ourselves, increase our self knowledge and slowly begin to liberate ourselves from our personal afflictions. If by teaching Iyengar yoga I may serve as a conduit to allow someone to achieve their goal of less pain and more self understanding, I will have succeeded. And because yoga as I experience it in this lifetime remains forever an aspiration, I can only hope to impart the simple beauty of integrating the external physical experience into a deep lifelong inward journey.



## Maitri is the Sanskrit word for Friendship



*Since its inception in 2004, more than twenty-five 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.*

*In Memoriam~*

*Jane Chalmers*

*December 6, 2008*

Jane began studying Iyengar Yoga as a teenager in Sydney, Australia. She came to Friendship Yoga in the summer of 2006 and was deeply committed to her practice, attending two classes per week when she was able, a fall intensive workshop, and participated in the Yoga sutras study group. Her sons Ryan and Wade continue on her yoga path as Friendship Yoga Kids. Jane made a very generous gift to the Maitri Yoga Education Fund upon her death, for which we owe her, her husband Knute and the boys our gratitude.



**Thus, Yoga uses the body,  
the container to touch the  
content, the soul.**

**BKS IYENGAR, FOREWORD  
YOGA WISDOM AND PRACTICE**



**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. Your donation is not tax-deductible. The benefit to you is the knowledge that you have helped someone less fortunate share the benefits that yoga offers us all.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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Newsletter layout by EnGen Design. erin.luong@gmail.com

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# Yoga & Fate

Yoga was not a major topic for conversation in the town where I grew up. It would have been out-of-place to talk yoga in the '40s and '50s in the bars and bowling alleys of Kewanee, Illinois—the world's Hog Capital. Nor was it the centerpiece of conversation at any of the three colleges I flunked out of in the '60s where I and my friends were involved in what I realize now were contra-yoga enterprises—striving to disconnect ourselves from our minds, bodies, and spirits—a process the military would help some of us complete. Little did I know that I was Fated to have a date with a destiny that included yoga.

That destiny began manifesting at a party in Bloomington, Illinois when I met a young Andrew Weil. Before graduating Harvard Medical School he had been a volunteer in Timothy Leary's LSD experiments and the editor of the school paper. After medical school he studied alternative health care practices, traveled throughout South America, and inhaled, ingested, and injected every mind altering substance, natural and man-made, he could find. He then wrote a book, *The Natural Mind*, explaining why our species seeks alternative states of consciousness. Thirty-five years and a dozen books later I would see him on Letterman or Oprah one week and on Larry King or 60-Minutes the next; TIME would name him as one of the 100 Most Influential People on the planet; and a mushroom would be named after him (*Psilocybe weillii*). Today LL (Lovely Lynn-my wife) and I will swallow

**Not one to react too quickly to a new idea, in the more than three decades it took Andrew Weil to become an international celebrity, I was slumping my way towards critical mass on whether to try yoga.**

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STORY | Gerald Partridge  
ILLUSTRATION | Connie Roberts

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vitamins that came from packets that bear his name from boxes that bear his picture. But back at the party in 1974 he was simply a burly, brilliant, bearded Andrew, full of wonderful stories, two of which were: 1) that he was able to overcome his fear of bees and wasps by getting high on peyote and making friends with them; and 2) that while he was able to reach exhilarating states of consciousness using various chemicals, none surpassed the "highs" he discovered he could achieve practicing yoga. I found these reports noteworthy. The first was probably reasonable enough, but the second felt like some kind of sign!

Not one to react too quickly to a new idea, in the more than three decades it took Andrew Weil to become an international celebrity, I was slumping my way towards critical mass on whether to try yoga. I looked for more signs: 1) our only daughter Vanessa began taking classes at Friendship Yoga from a serious-minded instructor (whose name was a smiling reminder of a song off my favorite Beatles' album); 2) Nessie was sufficiently inspired to consider trashing her career as a graphics designer to become a yoga instructor; 3) on her recommendation LL began making 65-mile round trips to take classes and was similarly impressed though not so inspired; 4) around this time I learned that the studio was located across the parking lot from my favorite store (the Crowded Closet); and 5) then we moved to Iowa City to a house that was less than a 3-minute bike ride to the studio (on a street with the word "Friend" in it). I might have dismissed all of these as mere coincidences had Fate not revealed itself in the form of the flyer LL brought home from class one day last Fall: "Friendship Yoga will be offering an introductory class for FREE." The scales over the windows of my perception fell, the jury returned with a verdict, and I began the end of the life I was destined to live, practicing yoga. Nancy's final words at my first session were: "I think we've caught you just in the nick of time."

Sometimes I envision my life as an obstacle course, each task another hurdle to overcome before reaching some imaginary finish line. Maybe I like the ever present challenges, much of the time setting them up myself, rearranging elements to make each impediment different from the last - looking to the horizon with a rush of anticipation and even hope for the new ones to appear. I enjoy making lists and then being able to cross off finished tasks. I beam with pride when I look back at the long trail of completions behind me, yet at the same time, cringe with remorse at the items left unchecked.

One of those left outstanding is *ahdo muka vrkasana* (downward facing tree pose or full arm balance), my nemesis in yoga class. I hadn't engaged in gymnastics as a kid - having been more at home building little structures in sandboxes than swinging by my knees from jungle gym bars. I only began practicing full-arm balance when in my fifties. I have always been strong and was confident about carrying my own weight - but flinging myself upside-down was against my natural inclinations. I know that I am not 'flinging' - it is a careful, almost delicate in its control, movement of one leg swinging up with the other quickly following, and touching - not slamming - into the wall above and behind my head. My world is suddenly reversed, becoming a *Bizzarroland* of opposition. Up is down, down is up and my mind - always planning ahead - mutinies before my first attempt.

My insecurity was amplified when I fell in my shop a few years ago and broke both bones of my right arm just above the wrist hinge. It was a dumb accident, one I should have avoided, but didn't and suddenly I faced the fact that I was fallible. Handstands were over for a while. I worked around my new shortcomings, and with Nancy's encouragement, came to yoga class with my wrist in a cast. Initially, it was a heavy plaster burden, which transitioned later into a sturdy light fiberglass cast. I was unable to do certain poses, but learned to work around my injury and trained myself to come into *sirsasana* (head balance). I was elated that the upside-down world finally became achievable. In time, my duration in the pose steadily increased, and my descent became more controlled.

So why should I have this problem with full arm balance? My Mom used to say 'wishing will make it so'. It's true and I wrestle with cynicism and defeat, trying to reason myself into an optimistic outlook. Success in this pose requires a leap of faith and trust that my skeptical nature resists. Each time I kneel in front of the wall and spread my palms flat, I begin to mentally sweat with the anticipation of failure - thus willing catastrophe. Hampered by my doubts, struggling to keep a clear level head, I am astonished when miraculously my legs swing up one after the other and I adjust to a world in reverse, marveling at the victory of matter over mind. I am not confident enough to completely cross this off my list, but I have a firmer grip on my pencil.



# Checks and Balances