



IYENGAR YOGA CENTRE of VICTORIA



Reflect, Refresh
and Transform
Your Practice

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IYENGAR YOGA
CENTRE of VICTORIA

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IYENGAR YOGA CENTRE OF VICTORIA NEWSLETTER

Submission deadline for Summer 2023
issue: April 15

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is a non-profit society incorporated under the
Society Act of the Province of B.C., whose
purpose is "to encourage the physical, mental,
and spiritual growth of its members and other
interested persons of the society at large by
the study and discipline of Yoga." The Society
owes its inspiration to Mr. B.K.S. Iyengar.

The Newsletter, published regularly by the
Iyengar Yoga Centre of Victoria Society,
provides current information on events
concerning Iyengar Yoga in the Victoria area.

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Reflections

by Shirley Daventry French

*Do asana a little, pranayama a little;
reflect a little, meditate a little,
Do japa a little, do kirtan a little,
write mantra a little, have satsanga a little.
Do all these, little, little. You will have time for all.*

– Swami Sivananda Saraswati

The late Swami Sivananda was one of India's great Yogis whose life and wisdom are revered throughout his native India and worldwide. Could it be that this great man did not want us to embrace the teachings of Yoga wholeheartedly? Or rather, as pointed out by one of his foremost disciples Swami Venketesananda, he was discouraging feeble efforts and warning about the dangers of diving into specialisation too soon in a subject about which you knew little or nothing and had everything still to learn.

Although it might make a good story to amuse and interest a few people, it doesn't matter a great deal when or how you came to practice yoga. Having become aware of its existence and with your curiosity aroused, what matters is that you find out what is involved and begin. If interested acquire some knowledge of the subject and experience it for yourself. There are myriad ways this can be accomplished.

These days most people begin with an *asana* class but it wasn't always thus. In fact, my husband and I were both initiated into Transcendental Meditation by the noted jazz flautist Paul Horn and took Tai Chi classes at the Y some time before we practised any *asana*. Paul was a good teacher; I liked him and liked the idea of meditation but was not yet ready to commit to regular practice. The purpose and benefits of repeating

a mantra were, however, planted in my mind to resurrect later when I did make a commitment to yoga.

In my experience true yogis are generous in their willingness to pass on their understanding and make their knowledge available to all who show a sincere interest. In his book *Raja Yoga*, Swami Vivekananda, an erudite teacher whose writing I really like states that there is no mystery in yoga and warns us to beware of those who encourage dependency. He emphasises that you have the right to find out for yourself and in fact: "It is wrong to believe blindly. You must exercise your own reason and judgment; you must practise and see whether these things happen or not".

Having taken your first step, if you keep going sooner or later you will face the challenges addressed in Patanjali's

yoga-sutras which are common to all spiritual disciplines. The Sanskrit word *sutra* literally translates as thread and Patanjali's *Sutras* are commonly referred to as aphorisms or seeds of truth. As with all seeds, certain conditions are required for them to germinate and fulfil their purpose: they must be fertilized and nurtured. Hence the many commentaries which we can use as guides on our personal journeys.

B.K.S. Iyengar, in the midst of teaching a class, in a crowd, in the Institute library and as I later discovered, on a plane, train, airplane, in a car, on a beach, around the dinner table, in a crowded restaurant, anywhere and everywhere he could find a link to the teachings of yoga. Even in a small boat buffeted by turbulent water uncomfortably close to the Niagara Falls (when I was seriously considering whether I was still strong enough to swim to shore if we tipped over) a few of us were graced with a discourse from Guruji linking this experience with yoga.

One of his favourite expressions when students he had taught asked questions about points of teaching was: "I gave you the clue!" It could have been that morning, yesterday, last month, last year or even further back. Students returning to the Institute for more training could rely on this happening; he would remember the smallest details about your difficulties and how he had

There is no longtime student of Guruji who has not had attention drawn to their omission or ignorance. Provided you did not waste time trying to defend yourself and listened intently you would receive guidance.

addressed them. His memory, honed by years of practice was phenomenal!

There is no longtime student of Guruji who has not had attention drawn to their omission or ignorance. Provided you did not waste time trying to defend yourself and listened intently you would receive guidance. Yoga *sadhana* has much in common with walking a labyrinth.

Patanjali's *sutras* are divided into four sections or *padas*, and many yoga

students are surprised, as I was, to find no mention of *yog-asana* until towards the end of the second chapter *Sadhana Pada*. Neither Guruji nor Swami Radha would have found it strange and neither do I now. Looking back it is clear that all four *padas* were tightly interwoven from the beginning of my journey—and perhaps earlier in life before I thought to call myself a yoga student.

From living and searching physically, intellectually and spiritually (although

I did not always know this is what I was doing) little by little many of the dichotomies which had haunted me throughout my life began to make sense.

I enjoyed playing outdoors but was equally happy indoors by the fire. The rug in front of the fire was a magic carpet taking me into the world of my mind and imagination. I liked books and radio (no television in my youth), theatre and group activities along with quiet pastimes such as reading, writing. I played every sport which came my way at the same time as I relished solitude. If I was mildly unwell, I didn't tell my mother because I never wanted to miss school but, on the other hand, if I had to or if it was closed (this was wartime and closure happened for many reasons) I was able to entertain myself alone at home.

Mine was not a churchgoing family but my meanderings did not exclude a search for faith, although to say the least this was not clearly defined. At age thirteen or fourteen I attended every church in my part of London. It was a very white Anglo-Saxon neighbourhood with a small sprinkling of Jews so there was one synagogue and I attended that just to see for myself. There were no Muslim or Hindu temples although ironically nowadays it has a large south Asian population.

I settled on a High Church of England because I loved the chanting, organ music, processions, rituals, the fiery but witty Vicar, and rousing hymns. It didn't hurt that these took place in a beautiful Norman church set in the grounds of an ancient Abbey which once had a feminist Abbess named Ethelburga who demanded equal rights for her nuns. Reflection, ritual, art and music were part of my life long before I heard about yoga.

Yoga is a spiritual practice. None of the great yogis I have been privileged to meet ever tried to convert me to their spiritual faith. In fact there is no tradition of conversion in Hinduism. Talks with both Guruji and Swami

Thank You!



- All of the following for their support with our virtual visit with Chris Saudek: Ann Kilbertus for hosting her, Ty Chandler for being the tech support for the weekend and, as always, Wendy, Britta, and the front desk for all the work coordinating behind the scenes with registration, etc. Thank you to our community far and wide by supporting the weekend with their participation. And, of course, most especially to Chris Saudek herself who helps us come into balance in many ways with her clear instructions and dedication to the legacy of B.K.S. Iyengar.
- Billie Essa for covering the front desk for two months while Hilary McPhail was away travelling.
- Our professional designer Peggy Cady who volunteered to update the archive of our newsletters. Each year is now combined so the list can fit into one attachment.
- Ann Kilbertus and Leslie Hogya for leading the B.K.S. birthday celebration on December 11 and for all the support behind the scenes from Ty Chandler (making the poster) and our front desk staff (taking registrations and sending Zoom links).
- Adia Kapoor for teaching the New Year's Day practice.
- Laine Canivet for helping us win Best Yoga Studio in the *Times Colonist* Reader's Choice Awards.
- Wendy Boyer for dealing with sudden problems, such as alerting the landlords of the ceiling leak in Arbutus on Boxing Day and repeatedly following up over the holidays.

Radha encouraged me to look once again at the teachings of Jesus whom they, along with many other yoga masters, consider to have been a very great Yogi.

The one thing each of them had in common and which any one of you who reads this and teaches yoga need to keep in mind, is that yoga is a discipline. As a teacher you must activate an internal feedback system which will let you know if you have taught well or not. Feedback from students is markedly unreliable. For instance, when I was teaching weekly classes and following the Pune Institute custom of monthly rotation: standing poses one week, seated poses the second, backbends the third and *pranayama* the fourth (inversions being taught each lesson), it was obvious that few of my male students enjoyed the forward bend week along with any class which started with *supta virasana*!

Similarly, students need to develop a trusted internal dialogue and practise on their own in addition to classes

or with friends and colleagues. Take classes and learn about sequencing, rotation, progression, your likes and dislikes. Learn to go beyond those opposites to explore the fullness of yoga. Establish the habit of daily practice which, provided you persevere, will bring wisdom, common sense and mindfulness into your daily life with its myriad activities, pauses and quiet times. Yoga will change from something you do to a human and humane way of living.

Once you have established a disciplined personal practice you will be able to answer questions for yourself such as what your needs are today as well as developing the inner seeing which allows all practices to be restorative, where efforts are directed towards needs not wants, neither too soft nor too hard, but exactly what your body/mind and self truly need on any day of the week.

Om Namah Shivaya,
Shirley ॐ

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Leslie Hogya & Louie Ettling: Imagination

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IYENGAR YOGA
CENTRE of VICTORIA

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

**Wednesday, March 1, 2023
4:00 pm - 5:00 pm**

As a non-profit society and registered charity we meet annually to appreciate our Board and volunteers for all the work they do. Members in good standing are welcome to attend and vote.

As in the past, this year's meeting will be held virtually. You will need the Zoom app on your device.

Business will include the election of board members and a review of the annual reports. The past year's financial statement and reports will be provided electronically along with the link to the Zoom meeting one day prior to the meeting.

We look forward to seeing you!

NOTE: Please register with the front desk prior to February 27 to receive the Zoom connection and the reports.

**Email: iyoga@telus.net
or call: 250-386-9642**

Searching for Happiness

by Leslie Hogya

In an article in *Yoga Rahasya*, B.K.S. Iyengar (Guruji) speaks of happiness. In defining happiness, he describes our states of awareness: the body, breath, mental state, and emotions. How do we transform the emotions to a higher state, to love? Cultivating love without attachment, if we can elevate that love, then inner peace is found. Further he says when the intelligence of the head and heart are blended then there is a joy – *ananada*. “The aim of yoga is to experience the non-colorization of happiness which ends only when one reaches from the skin through the inner body, cleansing the inner body, cleansing the mind, cleansing the intelligence, the consciousness....

It is beyond joy, and that I call is real happiness.” (p.4).

Transforming my yoga practice, from the physical everyday stretching of a muscle is the beginning of the journey. Looking for meaning, for spiritual connection inspires me in my yoga practice. For me it has become a source of quiet, equanimity. Doing *asanas*

seems to be a physical exercise, but as time goes on, what takes me to my mat every day? It is not just about stretching arms or legs, that would soon lead to it being mundane and boring. The sequences lead us on a transformational journey to a place of inner peace.

Mr. Iyengar was frequently asked if yoga was a religion. In one interview he says: “Yoga is a self-culture. Yoga in a nutshell has the disciplines of all religions.” (AYM, Vol 7, pg. 22-3) He goes on to say our bodies, mind, intelligence and natures are universal. Each one of us needs healing and wants solace and happiness in life. Yoga does that...”

Elsewhere I found some of Guruji’s notes on religious symbols.

Holy Cross of Christianity: The horizontal bar is higher up on the vertical bar which signifies that the mind and heart are closer to each other.

Head going down in Prayer in Islam: In *adho mukha svanasana* (downward dog) Guruji explained that the

significance of the head going down on the floor for Muslims is humility and humbleness towards God. When we recite the invocation, Geeta has said, we bring our head down at the end as sign of humbleness, being ready to leave the ego out of the practice.

Buddham: In *uttanasana* it is the complete surrendering of the intelligence like a devotee seeking refuge in the Buddha.

Central principle of Jainism-*ahimsa*, non-violence: express *ahimsa* when practicing *uttanasana*. Do not crush the microscopic life between the feet and the floor.

These examples give us some of Guruji’s thoughts on the universal nature of yoga.

Why do students want to do savasana when you ask them what they want to practice? I think it is because of the universal search for inner peace.

Why do students want to do *savasana* when you ask them what they want to practice? I think it is because of the universal search for inner peace.

If one is religious, the practice of yoga can enhance the journey of any faith. If one is not there is still a universal need for a spiritual connection to something greater than the materialism predominant in western culture. Singing, dancing, art, opera, theatre all can be avenues to finding a moment of stillness, of inner quiet.

In our culture, searching for connection can be elusive. Leonard Cohen, Canadian poet and song



“The aim of yoga, as I see it, is ultimately to reach the inner sanctum of eternal truth, which is a long process of transformation.”

writer singer was one who put some of these yearnings onto the airwaves with the lyric,

“There’s a crack in everything, that’s how the light gets in.” The light is without colour, without name or form. It is a symbol of the divine. I recommend the recent movie about Cohen and his song Hallelujah. This song has touched people in a very profound way. The need in us as human beings for a divine connection is expressed in this song, and it is inspiring to witness the audience’s reaction to its performance.

Geeta Iyengar wrote also in the same volume of *Yoga Rahasya*: “The aim of yoga, as I see it, is ultimately to reach the inner sanctum of eternal truth, which is a long process of transformation.”

“Small aims produce small gains that can lead a person to the final goal. Through a faithful practice of yoga, a person will develop compassion, patience, sensitivity, contentment, vigor, faith, and non-attachment, all of which can be viewed as achievements along the path to discovering the inner being.” (p.13.) ॐ

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Yoga Rahasya, Vol 25, No. 4.

Hallelujah: Leonard Cohen, a Story a Song (film).

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For more information, watch our website and check your Yog-e News.

Guruji on How He Learned Pranayama

Reprinted from *Yoga Rahasya* , Vol. 26 No. 2; 2019

On his early difficulties

I used to get up at four o'clock in the morning and sit for *pranayama*. I used to ask myself, how would be my first breath, if I was born today? On that basis, I created points to develop with care and attention to build up subtleties of *pranayama*. It may interest you to know that in the beginning I was a slave to the reactions of body and mind. I was just obeying the dictates of body and mind and also learnt to oppose their reactions

I, being a sick person, started Yoga in 1934 at the age of 16. I had no strength even to stand and my lungs would not expand. Naturally, even normal breathing was a strain. I started doing *asanas*. Then, circumstances forced me to teach Yoga, and I taught Yoga. Because I had to teach, I had to learn Yoga through my own practice and in order to learn I had to unlearn and relearn. This way, links of the chain of learning moved on and on, and it is still moving.

Naturally, at that time, it was not possible for me to do *pranayama*, even my Guru was unwilling to teach me, because my chest was like that (indicating a collapsed, narrow chest). I did not do *pranayama* at all up to 1942. When my Guru visited me in Pune in 1940, I asked him about *pranayama*, he just gave an outline. You know, what we call deep breathing, probably my age

would not have taken more than that he had said. Then, he said to do some deep inhalation, hold the breath and do deep exhalation. These are the only techniques my Guruji gave me to follow. I tried. As I tried, I did it only on a physical level.

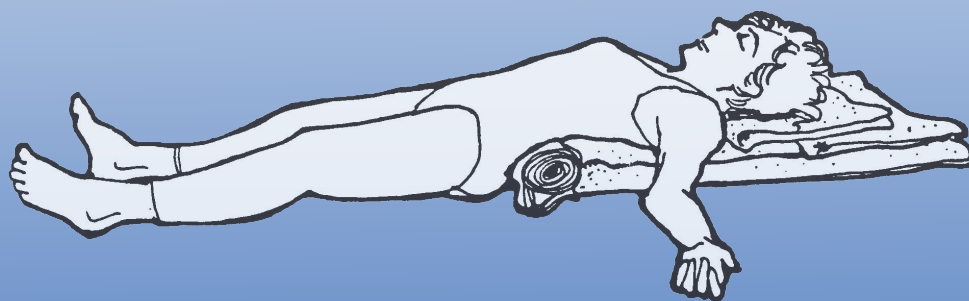
Though I did it, I did not succeed at all. If I did a deep inhalation, deep exhalation was an impossibility and vice versa. So, I questioned him, 'What to do?' He said. "Continue. It will come" And it never came.

I would get up each morning with a fervor in my mind to sit for *pranayama*. I had this bad habit of drinking coffee as soon as I was up from my early days. After going to the toilet, with a determination to make an effort, I used to sit for *pranayama*. After sitting in *padmasana* for a few minutes, my legs used to pain and chest muscles used to rebel. The mind was so weak that it surrendered to the dictates of body pain and heavy breathing to give up practice for the day. Even the moment I placed fingers on my nostrils, the inner carpet of the nostrils used to become rough and irritable. So, I said to myself that this is not for me. Each day the same routine continued, of sitting and wishing goodbye to *pranayama* for the day.

When I got married in 1943. I became lazy to prepare my early morning's coffee. I used to wake up my

dutiful wife to prepare coffee for me, saying that I have to do *pranayama*. Poor lady used to prepare it, as I was too lazy to get up before it was ready. Immediately, I used to brush my teeth and drink coffee and go for nature's call. My wife then went to bed again for a nap. I, as usual, sat for *pranayama* and in a few minutes, negative thoughts used to overpower me to give up *pranayama* practice for the day after a few trials. Failures lit large on my face and body. Like this, each day I followed the ritual which ended at once as I did not succeed in my attempts.

Instead of *pranayama*, I changed to *trataka*, you know, gazing. I used to draw a circular disc with the rays in black paint in the middle of a circular card with several rays in different directions. I said to myself as I can't do *pranayama*, let me do *trataka*. I started doing *trataka* without blinking the eyes. So my *pranayama* ended with *trataka*, and I began gazing for a very long time. Then one day I thought, 'What is this?' 'I have not learnt anything!' I had read in some books that if you do *trataka* you get this power, you get that power (laughter). But *trataka* gave me unpleasant sensations in my brain cells and eyes. I was getting irritated and my eyes began burning and used to become



“heavy. I developed day blindness. So, I stopped doing it.

Instead of *trataka*, I went back to try *pranayama*. I began *ujjayi* with deep inhalation and exhalation. Changing from sitting to lying down position. If I was restless in sitting position, I practiced lying down and when restless in lying down position, I sat and did. As I was restless, I changed my mind to do *nadi sadhana pranayama* as I had read that it was a good *pranayama* to start with.

My Guru never did *pranayama* in the presence of anyone. He used to do in his own room. So, there was no chance to see his practices. But he was a master in *pranayama*.

In 1944 I had an opportunity of going to Mysore with my wife, as she was pregnant and was expecting Geeta. As such, I went to take his blessings. It so happened that when I was there for about four or five days, one day in a hall, he was sitting and doing *nadi sadhana pranayama* and I saw his fingers on

Every Yoga teacher claims that if one is out of mood or dejected, practice of pranayama helps to overcome them. You can never do pranayama with an upset mind.

his nose, and that was the only lesson I had from him. I peeped through the window and observed his practice for some time (say 5 to 8 minutes); I saw how he placed his fingers on the nose, how he was moving his knuckles and changing from the right to left and back to the right and so on. I also watched his way of sitting, movement of his back, side chest and abdominal walls. This I gathered in two or three days and memorised to impart in my practices when I return to Pune.

After returning to Pune, I started practicing what I had seen. To my surprise, I could not sit erect like my Gururji. If I sat straight, in a few minutes, my spinal column used to become sore

and painful. My spine used to collapse. I realised that it was on account of my hours of practice of backbends. It was elastic but not strong. It had lost the power of resistance. If I kept up straight by force, my chest became taut and breathing was heavy and laboured.

So, I began to sit taking the support of the wall. This released the tension of the muscles of the chest but I could not sit longer. The moment soreness was felt, I used to do *asanas* like *matsyendrasana* to take off the soreness

Thus, my practice went on with failure after failure up to 1960. It is a long process. But you have to appreciate my patience in my impatience; hopes in repeated failures. Anyone else would have left but I was consistent and persistent with all my setbacks in the practice of *pranayama*.

Each morning, as a religious person, I used to get up at four (never missed) and sat for *pranayama*. After a few minutes or so, I had to open my mouth, or if I did one or two breaths, I had to wait for five minutes to take another two deep breaths. I was restless throughout. I used to sit in *padmasana* and still *pranayama* would not come. I used to lie down to try. After three or four breaths, I used to feel heavy in my head. Then I used to sit again to try.

Restlessly like this I tried *pranayama* in *padmasana*, in *baddha konasana* thinking that something may come in some pose. But problems of learning continued to disturb me. Believe me or not, though I never knew *pranayama*, I was forced to teach it to those who requested individual tuition.

I do not attribute this failure to my wrong practice of *asana* but due to overdoing them more than my nerves could take. As I was suspected of consumption, my lungs were not ready to take the load of *pranayama* for a long time. Even my Gururji was not keen to teach me *pranayama* on account of my



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physical condition. Probably he did not want to take risks on my vital organs which were affected due to lung diseases.

These failures taught me many things in the art of teaching *pranayama*. Though it is essential to learn from a master, I learnt the methods to impart this art if a teacher is not available. The credit and merit of my repeated struggles, failures and successes culminated in 1980 with my book, *Light on Pranayama*, that will act as a living Guru for a long time. Every Yoga teacher claims that if one is out of mood or dejected, practice of *pranayama* helps to overcome them. You can never do *pranayama* with an upset mind. That is what I learnt.

Sometimes I used to feel very fresh, and at other times, practice of *pranayama* was bringing moodiness and tension because I never knew how to relax the brain in inhalation or the art of grip needed in the process of exhalation.

When I was a novice in *pranayama*, someone gave me a book on *pranayama* to read. I read it. In it, it was said that while exhaling, cotton kept near the nose should not move. I tried to exhale like this but when I attempted, I could not inhale with ease. Then I thought to myself, if exhalation is to be so soft and smooth, how should inhalation be? There was no mention of the inhalation process in any books.

This made me think and remodel my practice to balance activity and passivity evenly.

In 1948 I was invited by Shri J Krishnamurthi to teach him yoga. He speaks of passive alertness. His psychological passive alertness was similar to those who dealt on the theory of exhalation. Without feeling

This made me think and remodel my practice to balance activity and passivity evenly.

I learnt from this experience that back bends strengthen the inner muscles while forward bends develop and strengthen the outer muscles of the spinal column.

the breath touching my inner nostrils I tried inhalation. When I attempted in this passivity, my heart began to beat strongly and heavily. This made me do soft inhalation with a gentle touch with the inner carpet of the nose. I felt a sense of exhilaration and quietness. This, I thought must be the right method and began to manipulate the intercostal muscles of the chest, the fingers on the nose and so forth.

In 1960, while I was in Gstaad, Switzerland, the weather was very congenial. There I used to prepare my own coffee and practice *pranayama*. While I was practicing daily, one day I felt the delight and tasted the fragrance of the incoming breath. The weather was neither cold nor warm but exhilarating. That sensation which I felt, gave me the clue to play with my digits – my fingers and thumb on the gates of the nasal passage to create that feeling. From then on, I practiced *pranayama* daily with interest.

Though I had seen my Guru's practice and placement of fingers. I have to confess that I learnt more from my own pupil, the famous violinist Dr. Yehudi Menuhin. Being a great violinist, I observed the ways of placing the crown of his fingers on the strings, flexion of the knuckles, pulling and pressing of the violin strings. I began to manipulate the fingers and play them on my nostrils as though my nose was a musical instrument. Actually, I translated my pupil's dexterity of finger movement

to my nose. Thus, he became indirectly my Guru in the art of manipulating the digital fingers for my practice of *pranayama*.

In short, it took me twenty to twenty-two years to begin *pranayama* with earnestness after I was initiated into Yoga by my Guru.

As I told you earlier. I was paying more attention to backbends as they are spectacular. In 1958, for the first time, I made up my mind to do forward bends with chronological timings like back bends. The excruciating pains appearing while performing backbends used to disappear immediately after the practices. But the forward bends brought soreness and dull pains and continued for hours even after the practices. The pain was of such a nature that I felt as if someone was hitting me with a sledge hammer.

This pain from forward bendings made me live with pain but in due course I mastered them. I do them with timings once a week even to this day and many of my pupils adopted the same system.

Forward bends began to help me in keeping the spine erect while doing *pranayama*. I learnt from this experience that back bends strengthen the inner muscles while forward bends develop and strengthen the outer muscles of the spinal column. I could use the inner and outer muscles of the spine ; in parallel while doing *pranayama*.

This taught me a lesson that forward bends, back bends and lateral movements of the spinal muscles ought to be developed to tone the muscles of the spine as they act as a base for good *pranayama*.

On how he started teaching

It was not a question of surrender then. It was a question of will-power. I had only one thing in my mind. That was, how to make myself fit to teach *pranayama* for group classes. Though I agreed to teach, I found that I could

not explain well. I changed them into meditation classes by explaining the mental feelings of the after-effects of *pranayama*.

I tried to explain methods of *pranayama* that I was doing. But the right words were not coming. Even the practice of *trataka* came back and I began to explain meditation by progressing from active, non-winking of the eyelids with closed eyes to the passivity of the eyelids and eyeballs towards passivity of the eyeballs with closed eyes.

While I was explaining the passive sides of the *trataka*, I was acting as a teacher and as a pupil at the same time. If one part of my intelligence acted as a Guru, the other part acted as a *sisya* (pupil). So, I was a Guru and a *Sisya* on myself. That made me think, and carefully use words so that the learners could get the points rightly. I also used to work on myself using the same words to see the reactions. Often, I constructed words according to my experience and changed my stance in group classes.

Through actions and observations, I understood the ascending and descending energies of my intelligence and learnt the art of surrendering the intelligence and will-power from the seat of the head towards the seat of the heart (conscience) which soon helped me to

I was a pioneer to introduce asanas in groups in 1937.

teach *pranayama* techniques better and better. That's how I learnt to practice and teach. It has nothing to do with will-power or surrender. It was only a question of my own weakness and confusion.

As the challenge came to me to teach *asanas* in 1936, similarly it came to me from my pupils to teach *pranayama* also. In those days, when I was teaching group classes, many of the yogis criticised me saying that *asanas* could not be taught on a mass scale. I was a pioneer to introduce *asanas* in groups in 1937.

Similarly, I accepted the challenge of teaching *pranayama* in group classes and gained confidence in teaching. Until then I was under the impression that *asanas* could be taught to many at the same time, but not *pranayama*.

After years of experience, I learnt the art of seeing many doing at the same time and could observe the mistakes at once. I codified the general sentences needed for public classes and slowly developed to impart subtle points of explanations which people could understand with ease. This is how I learnt the art of practice and art of teaching *pranayama* simultaneously.

On why learning *asanas* before *pranayama* is necessary which is not often taught by the other schools.

It is true that most people recommend *pranayama* first. I feel that one has to make the inner body healthy, clean and free from blocks through *asanas* to prepare the body for the life force (circulated in the body) generated from the practice of *pranayama*.

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Hence, I prefer the body—the temple—to be clean and healthy for the life force to move freely without obstructions. It is a fact that all text books speak of ratio of inhalation, exhalation and retention whereas, Patanjali does not speak of ratios but of depth, subtlety and precision. If one concentrates on counting the numbers of seeing the movement of the second-hand needle of the watch, then the practitioner is only interested in attending to the numerical numbers and not attending to the breath, movement of breath within the body, the reaction of the fibres and the reaction of the cells. Even muttering the mantras while doing *pranayama* may become a *japayoga* and not a *pranayama* yoga. If one is doing *pranayama*, one should be totally absorbed in the fineness of in-breath, out-breath and naturality of retention without unnecessarily disturbing or jerking the vital organs and nerves, or without stress in the cells of the brain.

Suppose one's capacity of inhalation is long and counting of a mantra in a certain meter is six times or eight times, does one exhale as per the same rhythm in the meter or does one say the mantra fast in order to finish them in the process of exhalation?

If one is doing pranayama, one should be totally absorbed in the fineness of in-breath, out-breath and naturality of retention without unnecessarily disturbing or jerking the vital organs and nerves, or without stress in the cells of the brain.

Suppose, the lungs cannot hold on to the prolonged inhalation or exhalation, what does one do then? One pays attention to complete the mantras rather than paying attention to the qualitative approach in the process of inhalation or exhalation. In such cases, inhalations may be prolonged ones, while exhalation period may be short or vice versa. So, concentration in such cases are not on *pranayama* but on the mantra. Thus, one loses the actual practice of *pranayama*. Many would be more particular to finish the counts or the mantra while doing *pranayama*. In that case it cannot be termed as *pranayama* but as *mantrayama*. It is better to keep the brain as an instrument to witness and observe the smooth flow of inhalation and exhalation. Watch the interruptions occurring even in inhalation to exhalation. Check unknown occurrences of interruptions, and smooth flow sets

in. Similarly, in retention, learn to retain the first grip throughout with stability. If that stability loosens, better to let go the breath, rather than holding the breath with strain.

Prana is life force commonly known as bio-energy. We are made up of five elements. If the element of earth is the foundation, the element of ether is the distributing element. The element of air acts as a piston in the form of inhalation and exhalation to the two remaining elements, water and fire (which are opposite to one another) through which energy is generated. This is *pranayama*. ॐ

INTERVIEWED BY NEELA KARNIK AND REPRINTED FROM 70 GLORIOUS YEARS.

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Maureen Carruthers

We are saying goodbye to one of the early pioneers of Iyengar Yoga in Canada. Maureen Carruthers died December 5, 2022.

Maureen Carruthers, of Vancouver BC, was perhaps one of the earliest yoga practitioners in Canada to be introduced to Iyengar yoga. She has written a memoir of her first exposure to yoga and her experience of the early days of Iyengar yoga. Below is an excerpt from that memoir.

One of the books we learned from was B.K.S. Iyengar's *Light on Yoga*.

It was during that period I had the good fortune to meet Donald Moyer in 1974. Donald had recently arrived in Vancouver from London, England, and brought with him an understanding and practice of yoga that he had learned from his teacher, Penny Nield-Smith; she in turn was a student of the great master from Pune, India, B.K.S. Iyengar. It was Donald's practice and knowledge of yoga that inspired me to start working deeply with this method, and to begin teaching it to others. He happened to be in my house taking a pottery class and he could also see into the room where I was practising my yoga *asanas*. I was practising *utthita trikonasana* and Donald could see that I had not been taught this pose well, according to the understanding and depth that had come down from the master, B.K.S. Iyengar. So with kindness and understanding, he began to show me the alignment of the pose. What a blessing! What a gift! The deeper awareness of yoga that Donald gave me opened up a new world for me, and marked the beginning of my commitment to



the Iyengar method of yoga, from which I have never turned back.

The full memoir is available on the website of the B.K.S. Iyengar Yoga Association of Vancouver. Read it [here](#). ॐ

A beautiful tribute to Maureen from a long time student and friend

Maureen Carruthers

Bowing to my heart
in Namaste'
Honouring my teacher Maureen
My Heart fills with
Space....Light....Love.
...Shimmering
with heartfelt soft gratitude.
A true teacher
Who nourished and guided us,
like her flowers,
in how to unfold towards our
Greater Self.
With attention love and trust
Namaste'

– Annie Okuda

B.K.S. Iyengar in 1984

by Leslie Hogya

At the December 2022 celebration for the birth of B.K.S. Iyengar (Guruji), Ann Kilbertus and I led a practice based on Guruji's own classes. One practice was inspired by an article in *Yoga Rahasya*, Vol 25, No. 3, 2018. And the other from his book, *Arogya*, that has recently been translated into English. Preparing these classes prompted memories of my own experiences with Mr. Iyengar.

I was living in Victoria in the late 70s and early 80s, when Shirley Daventry French brought word of the genius of B.K.S. Iyengar. She had recently travelled to study with him and on her return, she inspired the local yoga community to follow his method of yoga practice. So, when I heard he was coming to N. America, I took the opportunity to attend events where he would be present.

My first face-to-face encounter with Guruji was at the first international Yoga Convention held in San Francisco in August of 1984. At the convention there were lectures, and a doctor's panel where Dr. Derek French participated. During the days, we were broken into small groups and stayed in our groups as the various teachers rotated. This was set up for him to watch teachers from around the world demonstrate their understanding of how to teach. I was blessed to have some of Guruji's Indian disciples including Mr. Tarapolewa, who had helped Guruji with his early writings. He was modest and humble, and attributed all he knew to Guruji. Some of the other teachers, were flummoxed by two students in my group who had severe scoliosis. Guruji appeared over the days of the classes and was presented with the same question, "Mr. Iyengar I need help. I don't know how work with these two people."

Guruji was patient and compassionate beyond measure. He used his hands, belts and any available props at hand, time after time to help these two, who were themselves sincerely grateful to learn new ways to work their spines.

Guruji was known for his fiery personality and strict teaching. He was strict because he wanted us to learn, to understand, to catch what he was trying to impart. But I witnessed first-hand that he was above all compassionate.

In early September of that year, Guruji extended his travels to Canada. Victoria hosted him for several whirlwind days. He arrived by private boat from Galiano Island, the then home of Bruce and Maureen Carruthers. This became a legendary journey as he used the bunks, supports and the mast in the boat to show how yoga could be done anywhere and everywhere.

Again, in Victoria, he wanted to observe our local teachers teach. But one day, he asked for a table, and stood on it to demonstrate and try and instill in us a glimmer of what he wanted us to understand. The portable table was not designed

for this, and some of us were cringing, at the thought it could give way.

There was a small private lunch with Swami Radha, founder of the Yasodhara Ashram in the Kootenays. She made a special journey to see him. The events ended at the then Crystal Gardens. The mayor of the city, along with Swami Radha were some of the guests of honour. Speeches, flowers, music, and food flowed in this special setting. The local yoga community had worked tirelessly preparing for this remarkable event. The organization, teaching schedule, dinner and protocols were spearheaded and coordinated by Shirley Daventry French who hosted him in her home.

These early encounters were more intimate than what became the norm as his fame spread. I was very fortunate indeed to be in his presence. Through it all, we were left star struck and in awe of his tireless dynamic power and genius. ॐ



Twisting Asanas

by Rajvi H. Mehta

A few years ago, there was a debate in the western media that many of the *asanas* currently being taught are of western origin. They felt that what Guruji's guru, T. Krishnamacharya taught, was influenced by the Swedish exercise forms. A few months later, this so-called controversy died down. Many people who see *asanas* as a form of exercise do tend to see some connection with some other form of exercise. Well, it is natural that to some extent people across the world would have generated similar ideas on how to move or mould the body.

We do see glimpses of inversions and backward arches as well as forward extensions in various moves of gymnastics. We see the standing *asanas* in some form of exercise. But, one set of *asanas* or even if we loosely translate them as postures, are the twisting *asanas* which are never seen in any other form of exercise. As far as I can recollect, I feel that the twisting *asanas* like *matsyendrasana*, *pasasana*, *marichayasana* are quite unique in themselves and have no similarities to anything else.

The depiction of *yogasanas* in cartoons before yoga 'came of age' in the west was often depicted as somebody 'knotted up' who could not disentangle herself of himself. These set of *asanas* or even if you call them postures are quite unique to yoga. They indeed have a strong effect on the body, mind as well as senses.

Skeleto-muscular benefits

The intense twisting can really strengthen the spinal muscles – and thus the spine. As we age, the spinal muscles weaken and therefore we become more prone to neck, back pain and later even slipped discs despite not having any specific intense cause for the same. It is just that the spinal muscles are weak and

one day, the vertebra that they 'hold' are no longer held well and the disc/meniscus between the vertebrae slips off. So, it is obvious that the regular practice of the twisting *asanas* help the spine and the spine is not a 'separate' part of the body. It is strongly connected to the arms and legs.

They help the spine and the spine supports them. Thus, spinal weakness would ultimately reflect on the functioning of our limbs.

Physiological benefits

The skeleto-muscular system in a way is a guardian of the organs or I would call it in the container for the organs. So, if something is done to the container

Twists/ turns/ coils in nature do give power and strength at the nano level/ at the micro level and even at the macro level as twisting asanas.

then the contents are bound to be affected. So, in these twisting *asanas*, the abdominal organs are totally squeezed or as Guruji would often say, squeeze and rinse like we used to rinse clothes in the era before the washing machines. This would squeeze the organs of the digestive system and 'squeeze' the enzymes which in turn would facilitate digestion. The kidneys are not spared and therefore get activated too.

Although the major effect of the twisting *asanas* appears to be in the abdomen, we cannot forget that the lungs too get an experience of the twist. One wonders whether this helps 'squeeze' out the toxins – as otherwise, we barely use the lungs fully. No wonder, it has been said that certain *asanas* even help digest toxins. Guruji never advised on food but practice. What we eat is not as important as what happens to what we have eaten.



It is here that the *asanas* play such an important role.

Mental effects

It is only the novices or the illiterate in yoga who would call *asanas* a physical exercise or a physical activity. No movement is possible without the involvement of the mind and the brain. And every movement in turn would have an effect on the mind and brain. The interaction between the body and the mind is not unilateral but bilateral. We all know the impact that a stroke in the brain has on the limbs! Each set of *asanas* acts on the entire body and mind but have a pronounced effect on some part. Twisting *asanas* tend to make one internalized very quickly. Guruji would often say that the mind has the ability go outwards and become *bhagic* or turn inwards and makes the mind yogic. For

some reason, the twisting *asanas* just bring about the U-turn of the mind. It possibly brings about this internalization much faster than even *savasana*.

There is something about these twistings. One wonders why it was not thought about by other forms of 'exercises'. The importance of these *asanas* can never be overestimated. Possibly that is the reason that most of them are all named after Sages and not based on the appearances like some other *asanas*.

Twists and turns seem to have their own power and strength. Coils have been very symbolic. The staff of the

Each set of asanas acts on the entire body and mind but have a pronounced effect on some part.

Greek God Asclepius is a symbol of medicine. A twig, a rod around which is coiled a snake. It is believed that since snakes shed skin and therefore it symbolizes rejuvenation which medicine is expected to do for a sick patient. Coiled snakes have been symbolic of fertility. Interestingly, our DNA is a double helix too. The DNA ensures that our lineage is continued from cell to cell – the “fertility” of a cell.

Why the DNA should have been a double helix. Well, it is possible that because it is helical it is less susceptible to breaks – at least physical breaks!

Recently, scientists at the University of York observed the building blocks of our skeleto-muscular system at a nano level. The scientists saw mineral crystals just five nanometers in diameter unexpectedly twisting into and around these collagen strands—forming a helical structure. This explains the strength and toughness of the bone. A mechanical and bioengineer of the University of

I think that twists, turns, and coils in nature do give power and strength at the nano level, at the micro level, and even at the macro level, as simple twisting asanas.

Illinois explains that like a coiled spring, a helical structure can support greater loads before breaking compared with simple linear structures.

I think that twists, turns, and coils in nature do give power and strength at the nano level, at the micro level, and even at the macro level as simple twisting *asanas*.

It is interesting that as we age, the ability to do the 'complete' twisting *asanas* diminish. All we need to do is look at people of different age groups. Younger people are able to do it with ease but as one gets older, the difficulty level increases. One can argue that younger people are thinner and waist fat takes over as one ages. Well, even if the waist and abdominal fat is not too high, twisting *asanas* are somehow not as easy.

I wonder whether these are the effect of aging or a reflection of aging.

We need to give much more importance to this interesting category of *asanas* whose power goes far beyond what is visible. Maybe their regular practice would give us the strength of the body, organs and mind. ॐ

THIS ARTICLE IS REPRINTED FROM YOGA RAHASYA, VOL. 25, NO. 4; 2018.

STUDENT INTENSIVE

Save the dates!

August 28 - September 1, 2023

9:30 am – 12:30 pm

Members' Practice



All 2023 members of the Iyengar yoga Centre of Victoria who attend a regular class or have received permission from the practice monitor are welcome to participate in an open practice every Sunday afternoon from 1:00 - 3:00 pm.

There is no instruction given in this self-directed practice session. Props, books, and other resources are available for the use of anyone who attends.

Come for 20 minutes or stay for two hours!

Same protocols as for studio classes.

The only prop you need to bring is your mat.

Free for all 2023 members.

A Class with Guruji

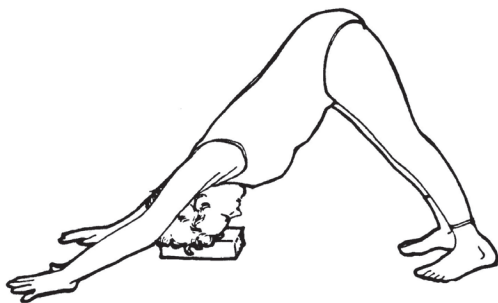
REPRINTED FROM YOGA RAHASYA, VOL. 25, NO. 3; 2018

Many young readers of *Yoga Rahasya* would not have had a chance to meet Guruji, leave alone attend a regular class with him. So, we reprint some tips from Guruji in one of the general classes that he taught at RIMYI in February 2011. The reader is expected to know the basics of the *asanas* discussed here. In case, they do not know them, then they should refer to *Light on Yoga* and *Yoga in Action*.

Virasana to proceed towards *adho mukha virasana*:

1. Roll your calf muscles out. Sit on your buttocks anus up and back ribs in.
2. Extend your arms from
 - the waist corners palms facing each other,
 - from the inner armpits extend the arms forward.As you come forward,
 - raise the head up sternum forward,
 - look toward outer armpits moving forward.
3. Keep the palms down with the little finger on the floor, back ribs continuously coiling in and sternum moving forward and from the extreme corners, the side trunk moving forward and do *adho mukha virasana*.

Keep the trunk like a box



Adho mukha svanasana:

1. Press the palms on the floor.
2. Front edge of the side trunk and back edge of the side trunk should be like a plank. The entire side body should be like a plank.
3. Move the sternum towards the legs.

Uttanasana:

1. Move the “plank” of the side trunk forward. Lift the head up keeping the back concave.
2. Make a circle from back armpit towards the front armpit coiling your back ribs in and raising the head up.

Second attempt:

1. Keeping the elbows bent, increase the concavity of the back. Keep the eyes connected with the back.
2. Move the back ribs in, dip the navel down and pelvis down.
3. Make the arms straight by moving the navel forward and move the pelvis forward.

Uttanasana to *adho mukha svanasana* to *uttanasana* to *adho mukha svanasana*:

From *uttanasana*: with bent elbows, with the bent knees, retaining the concavity of the back, walk back to *adho mukha svanasana*. Keep the back ribs and legs straight and again walk forward to *uttanasana* with the back concave. Repeat this action from *uttanasana* to *adho mukha svanasana* two to three times.

Upavistha Konasana:



1. Extend the back of the leg from the buttocks to the heel. Let the back of the leg be like a plank. Inner knees down and inner heels down.
2. This gives you more coiling action of the back. Coil the skin of the back towards the spine.
3. Place the palms cup-shaped by the side of the hips. With the arms bent at the elbows, move the outer elbows towards the inner elbows.

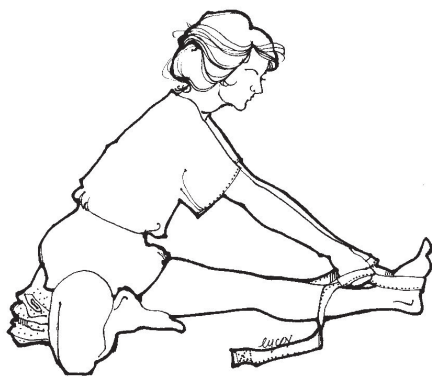
4. Move the area of the kidneys in. (It is an organic pose). Moving the kidney area in and up let the inner thighs go down.
5. Finally hold the elbows *baddha hasta*), lengthen the armpit skin, kidneys in and up.

Baddha Konasana:



1. Place the palms by the side of the hips and move the buttocks forward. Then hold the feet with the palms, move the side body forward.
2. Keeping the elbows bent, palms holding the feet; extend the upper arms towards the elbow as well as the forearms moving towards the elbow. The meeting point is the elbow.
3. Hold the feet, coil the back armpit to the front armpit. Pits of the legs (groins) have to go down as though there are weights kept on your groins.
4. Lift the side body from the waist corners. Move the groins down and lift the side body up.
5. Keep the palms behind the buttocks and raise the buttocks up. While lifting up, bring the outer thighs down, and the socket from the back to the front, take the knees down and then sit in *baddha konasana*.

Dandasana to janu sirsasana:



1. Bend your right leg for *janu sirsasana*. Keep the back of the left leg like a plank.
2. Keep the groin of the right leg down and take the arms up.

3. Extend the arms forward. Move the arms and head forward. Both should move forward together. Move from the inner arms.
4. Extend your arms forward from the waist corners, but the arms and head should be in one line.
5. Keeping the right socket down; pits of the leg down, go on extending the right arm and the inner arm forward further and further.
6. As you go forward the web between the thumb and index finger has to move forward. The web has to drag your hand forward. Do not hold the foot.
7. As you move forward, armpit circularly moves from back to front, lengthen the skin of the arm pit and then come up. Repeat the *asana* by bending the left leg.



From dandasana to urdhva hasta dandasana to paschimottanasana:

1. Sit in *dandasana*. Inhale, raise the arms up to *urdhva hasta dandasana*.
2. Keep the arms and head in one line.
3. As you extend the arms and trunk forward to go into *paschimottanasana* – go down by keeping the upper arms touching the ears; and the head and upper arms in one line. The eye balls parallel to the floor
4. As you extend forward and down, the eyes are perpendicular to the floor. Inhale, raise the trunk up; come up “half way”, moving shoulder blades forward and deeper in; slowly come up.

Adho mukha swastikasana

1. Sit in *swastikasana*. Inhale, extend your arms. Keep the upper arms in line with the head. The sides of the chest should be like a plank.
2. Release the skin of the arms away from the armpit chest. Extend forward from the web between the thumb and index finger and armpit chest.
3. Move the arms and the head down; move the sternum.

Sirsasana:

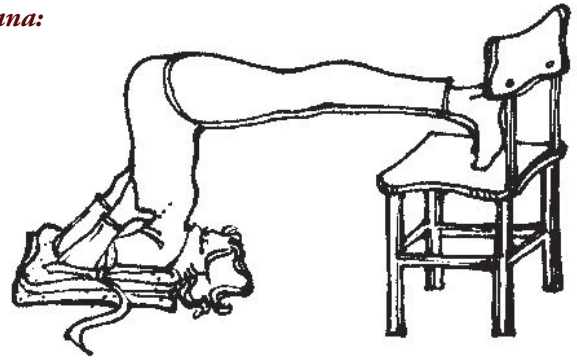
1. Go into *sirsasana*.
2. Move the inner armpit and outer armpit forward. Forearms strong on the floor for the side 'plank' of the trunk to become long.
3. Move the outer elbow towards the inner elbows so that the upper arms are perpendicular to the floor.
4. Widen the inner shoulder to the outer shoulder and narrow the outer elbows. When you widen the shoulders, the biceps will get lengthened
5. With all these actions the front end of the side body and the back end of the side body should be of the same length. Shoulders up. Deltoids in and up.
6. When the inner legs drop, the inner armpit also collapses. Lift the inner legs from the groins to the heels. With this lift, inner body feels life. The inner armpit and outer armpit should be of the same height.
7. The back should be like that of *adho mukha svanasana*.
8. Move your metatarsals from outside in; arches of the feet roll from inside out like in *upavistha konasana*.
9. Suck the hips in like *baddha konasana*. The outer side of the hips have to raise up towards the ceiling.
10. Thighs have to be circular.

Be lively in *sirsasana* by increasing the height from the toes. Alert the back-rib corners. The whole pose changes. Otherwise dead weight comes on the arms.

Sarvangasana:

1. Go into *salamba sarvangasana*.
2. Lifting the back up, let the palms go down.
3. The back of the inner thighs should not be "hiding" inside. Lift the body higher up from the junction of the buttock and thigh.
4. Widen the arches from inside out. Broaden the inner heel towards the outer heel.

Halasana:

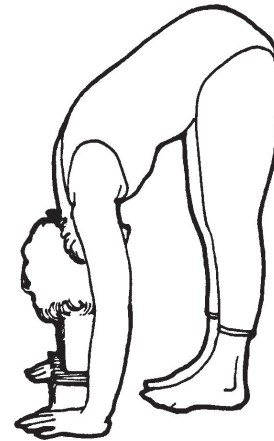


1. Keep the tips of the toes on the floor and the feet like *upavistha konasana*.
2. The outer hip sockets should be parallel to the floor.
3. The front of the hip socket and back of the hip socket should be parallel to each other.
4. Press the tips of the toes down on the floor and widen the knees.
5. Keep the inner edge of the foot and outer edge of the foot parallel.

Paschimottanasana:

1. When you go forward in *paschimottanasana* from *dandasana*, the side body should be like a plank. The web between the thumb and the index finger should be more powerful to move the side body forward.
2. Holding the feet, keep the eyes and eye balls parallel to the floor and move the head down.

Uttanasana:



1. Go into *uttanasana*.
2. Entwine the arms at the elbows. Holding the elbows close your eyes.
3. Head down legs active brain cells passive.
4. Slowly come up. The closed eyes brings coolness to the body.

The class ends! ॐ

Good News from our IYCV Annual Appeal!

Our annual appeal donations are at \$31,900 toward our goal of \$35,000. We only need \$3,100 more to meet our 2023 target.

Thank you to all our generous donors!

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Thanks for supporting your Iyengar Yoga Centre!

IYCV calendar

MARCH

**1 Annual General Meeting
12 Sunday Workshop**

APRIL

21 First Aid course

JUNE

**19-23 Summer Enrichment Series
21 International Day of Yoga**

AUGUST

**14-18 Teacher Intensive
28-Sep 1 Student Intensive**

Coronavirus Notice

We ask that students registering for in-studio classes be double vaccinated. Please refer to our website for current information on events.



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- Library borrowing privileges
- Free practice space on Sunday afternoons
- Opportunities for members to contribute insights and apply to sit on the board of directors.

One-year membership fee: \$42 CDN (\$40+\$2 GST), renewable each January.

Complete the form below, drop it off or mail it with your cheque or money order to:

**Iyengar Yoga Centre of Victoria Society,
c/o Hilary McPhail, 202-919 Fort Street, Victoria BC V8V 3K3 Canada**

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

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PROV/STATE: _____ POSTAL CODE: _____

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- ☐ Sign me up to receive the weekly Yog-e News by email with announcements and current events.
- ☐ Unsubscribe from weekly Yog-e News.
- ☐ Receipt required.

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