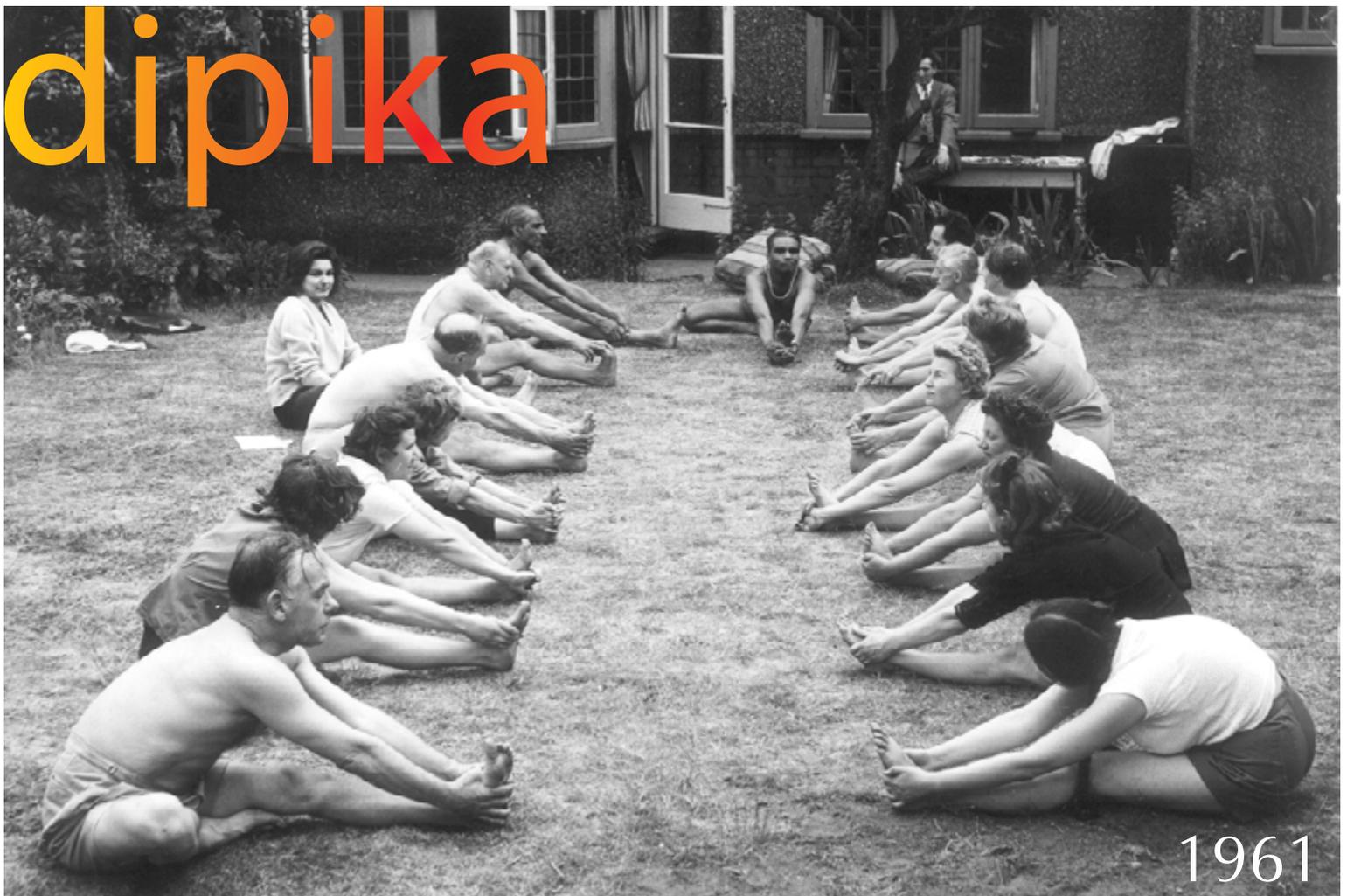


dipika



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Editorial

Welcome to another online edition of Dipika. We have been through frightening and depressing times but there are things that may have changed for the better. Zoom has kept us connected to our weekly classes. There are two articles which demonstrate that our regular classes not only keep us flexible and sane, but keep us connected to our teachers and fellow students as well (p.2 and p.12). For many who have embraced this online learning, it has even increased the frequency and intensity of practice. Those of us who follow the path of yoga know that it is not just for the body and the mind but can help with creativity and artistic pursuits too. Four longstanding students working in creative fields share their views (p.6). Richard Agar Ward, who is one of the most senior teachers in the country and a teacher at IYMV, reveals to us how he got into Iyengar Yoga and shares memories of his first meeting with BKS Iyengar. Iyengar teachers often mention parts of our anatomy that we may not have known before but which we certainly feel after a strong class. There are also some “Iyengarisms” which are not true anatomical definitions, like the “armpit chest”. Alice Chadwick, Dipika’s co-editor, provides us with an illuminating article on the actions and effects of the armpit chest (p.34). Finally, and very close to my heart, is the quest to find the house where the first UK Iyengar Yoga class took place exactly 60 years ago. Having researched the subject for a long time, and with a good amount of serendipity and luck, I found the birthplace of Iyengar Yoga in the UK. Dipika is certainly more than just a newsletter; it’s a magazine where important facts about IYMV and Iyengar Yoga are documented for posterity.

With gratitude and wishing you some happy reading,

Korinna

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Online Classes

Lucy Astor

I have been a fan of the Iyengar Yoga Maida Vale since attending my first introductory class in 2014. I had been inspired to sign up after hearing an obituary of BKS Iyengar on the radio. That first class felt like coming home for me. My siblings and I, as children, had learnt yoga postures from our grandfather that he had learnt in the Indian Army. As soon as I started an Iyengar class, it felt familiar to me. I had often tried yoga classes before but, as an overly flexible person, I could easily do the poses in a way that sooner or later would put my back out. At the IYMV, I liked the feeling that my hypermobility was not going to fool anyone into thinking I was any better than I should be.

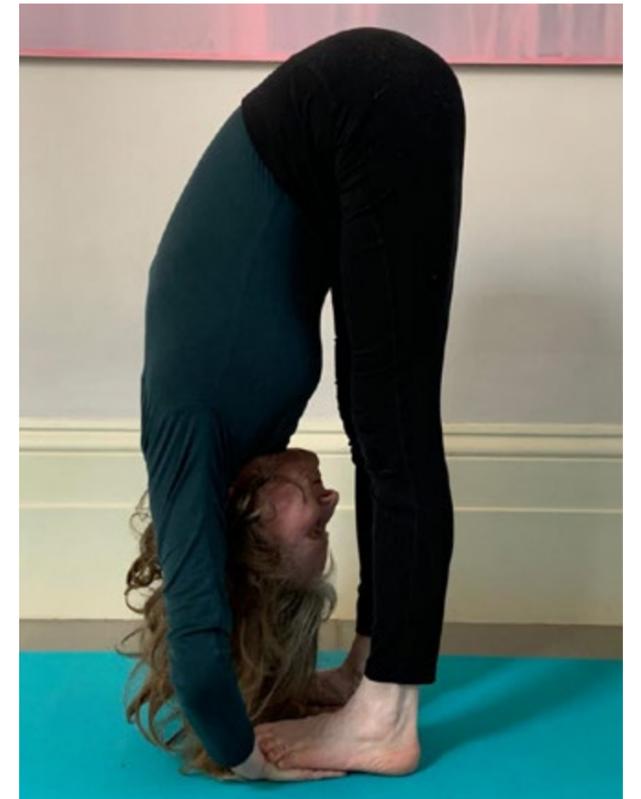
When the first lockdown happened, one of my first thoughts was what am I going to do without classes? I bought *Light on Yoga* (not before time) and started to practise on my own (also not before time). But I couldn't have been more pleased when the IYMV began to offer classes online. It was the luxury I would have wanted on a desert island and it radically changed my whole lockdown experience.

Online classes are a surprisingly good substitute for going to the studio. Seeing the same teachers and hearing familiar names of other students gives a feeling of continuing to be part of a community. Not a community in that it is social or like work colleagues. It is a connection that feels durable and impersonal, based on a solid foundation of shared practice. This isn't the most important element for me, but it is an unexpectedly enjoyable bonus.

I am always surprised to find that I enjoy the element of obedience in Iyengar classes. I am not remotely obedient by nature but I really love the feeling of surrendering my intention to the voice and directions of the teacher, in unison with the rest of the class. It feels like being in a shoal of fish or a flock of birds. Oddly, it feels like freedom.

Another quality that I value in these classes, again unusually for me, is precision. I really enjoy it in a teacher's verbal instructions and corrections. I also enjoy aspiring to, and occasionally feeling progress in, the precision of my poses. Precision is not a feeling that comes naturally to me; approximation feels way more familiar.

I am fascinated by the different atmospheres created by teachers. The qualities that I enjoy include economical use of words; the right mixture of friendliness and formality; certainty. An attribution of ego to students always feels like projection. I don't particularly want to be either charmed or shamed. The magic of



the relationship between teacher and students is highlighted in the weirdness of online classes. An atmosphere in which I can, seemingly without effort, concentrate and extend my limits is a rare and precious thing. As a psychotherapist, this alchemy is of enormous interest to me. All research shows that, regardless of therapeutic technique, the quality of the relationship between practitioner and client is the real agent of change.

“

Spiritual freedom requires greater self-control and the ability to direct our lives in the right direction.

- B.K.S. Iyengar

And increasingly it seems to me that, in both practices, the crucial ingredient is who the teacher or therapist is, more than what they actually do. Their integrity, experience and directional focus are what make the difference.

My psychotherapy practice has really benefitted from the way that yoga enhances so deeply my body consciousness. An important tool, particularly working with clients who have suffered trauma, is embodied countertransference. This means learning to observe, moment by moment, nuances of my own somatic responses to the client's emotional state. This minute consciousness of my own bodily experience gives a much less fallible reading of the client's internal state than clever thoughts or theories.

There are so many other benefits of Iyengar yoga practice: flow, grace, balance (particularly hard for flexible me), strength and interiority. At a more prosaic level, lockdown life and online classes allow me to attend more classes, more regularly; they're more time-efficient too, with no queuing for props etc. I know I am guaranteed ninety minutes of utter engagement. I have noticed recently that I am waking up in the morning feeling completely comfortable in my body, and I am amazed that this should be the case in my sixties. I could go on. However long I do it, there will always be scope for more mistakes, more adjustments, more learning. I love the feeling that this is a bottomless well.



New Research by Northumbria University, Newcastle

Perceptions of Online Therapy Yoga Compared to Face-to-face Yoga in People with Multiple Sclerosis and Vasculitis

Yoga has been shown to be effective in improving postural control in a variety of neurological and ageing conditions, in particular multiple sclerosis (MS). Recent research has found that yoga for MS can decrease fatigue and bring improvements in gait and posture, anxiety and depression.

The aim of this study is to evaluate the use of Iyengar Yoga online classes for people with MS and vasculitis. Due to COVID-19 a lot of exercise classes have had to move to online platforms (Zoom, Microsoft Teams). The purpose of the study is to gain a wider understanding of people's perceptions of online yoga and to assess its benefits and negative aspects in comparison to face-to-face teaching.

The research team is led by Dr Gill Barry, a biomechanist based at Northumbria University, whose work focuses on exercise and neurological conditions, with a special interest in the use of digital technology. Dr Gemma Wilson, a registered health psychologist also based at Northumbria, co-led the project. Together they conducted interviews with yoga teachers and students who regularly attend online yoga classes.

Iyengar Yoga online classes for MS and neurological conditions with Korinna Pilafidis-Williams, Thursdays at 12.00pm

YOGA & THE CREATIVE ARTS

For all of us, yoga can be a wonderful counterbalance to work, bringing us energy and focus and easing out our knots and strains. For the artist, yoga can relate very closely indeed to the creative process. Reflection and action; precision, stamina and courage; the freedom to search deep within and reach far beyond the self – these qualities sustain both practices. Here four of our students, working in different creative fields, reflect on how the art of yoga supports their work.

Suhail Yusuf Khan

Suhail Yusuf Khan is a sarangi (North Indian bowed viol) player, vocalist and composer. He is working towards a PhD in Ethnomusicology at Wesleyan University, USA. His UK folk-Hindustani trio, Yorkston/Thorne/Khan, was voted Number 1 in The Guardian's 'Best of 2020' listings.



I was born and raised in a family of hereditary Hindustani (North Indian) music practitioners (eighth generation) and therefore I was exposed to spirituality and *guru-sisya parampara* (an ancient Indian tradition of knowledge transmission from guru to student) at an early age. However, with the demise of my illustrious grandfather and teacher, Ustad Sabri Khan (1927–2015), I lost this student-teacher bond and connection to spirituality. In the summer of 2018, upon a friend's advice, I tried Iyengar Yoga and have been a student ever since.



We are aware of yoga's impact on our health and well-being. In my case, yoga has not only enhanced the intellectual and spiritual balance, but has further developed the philosophical association music has with life. Often, the physical aspects involved in music practice are ignored by musicians. Nevertheless, scholars have shown the importance of physical posture and mindful breathing in musical performance. To master the art of performance, a musician must learn control over their body – this can be achieved through the practice of yoga.

Yehudi Menuhin writes in *Light on Yoga*: "Yoga induces a primary sense of measure and proportion". My yoga practice helps my instrument, the sarangi, resonate with the cells of my body and, with the balance of left and right that yoga teaches, enables my intonation to move with *prana* (life force). By giving freedom in our bodies and peace in our minds, IYMV provides that experience of spirituality which has the sacredness of the *guru-sisya* tradition at its heart, transmitted through the teachings of BKS Iyengar. Namaste!

www.yorkstonthornekhan.com

Teodora Danciu

Teodora Danciu is a software developer living and dancing Argentinian Tango in London.

The practice of yoga and dancing have been intersecting and entwining in my life in surprising ways. The physical benefits that yoga brings to dancing are perhaps obvious – strength, tone and alignment. As invaluable as these are, over years of practice I have discovered a whole world that lies beyond these physical benefits, a world that profoundly and continuously changes my life in general and my dancing in particular. It is difficult to capture in words, but perhaps it is best described as learning to cultivate my mind and create harmony between my mind, body and breath.

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Through my yoga practice, I have found a way to relate to dancing which goes to the root of creativity and freedom.

This stillness and focus of mind allow me to access ever deeper layers within myself. From this depth, self-expression becomes more genuine, as if the stillness permits the essence to come through. The dance then becomes a sincere expression of the ways in which life has shaped me over the years, but also of what it feels like to be alive and alert moment by moment.



The mind wants to waver, but returning to this stillness over and over is what allows the dance to “dance itself”. For me, this is the place where serendipity and creativity can start; where ambition, ego and judgement loosen their grip and are replaced by concentration. This concentration is gentle but steady, expanding from the body to the dance partner, to the music, to the dance floor or stage.

Through my yoga practice, I have found a way to relate to dancing which goes to the root of creativity and freedom. I have learnt to approach each posture with fresh eyes every time, and to trust accumulated knowledge, while remaining conscious of what is available “in the moment”. This is particularly important in my dancing because it is an improvised partner dance. I have to respond as if for the first time to music that I know well and to the movements and signals of my dance partner that I have encountered many times before. Known, but also new every time, it is the quiet alertness learnt in yoga that allows me to respond with joy and authenticity to whatever the dance becomes.

Rolf Killius

Rolf Killius is an ethnomusicologist, museum consultant and exhibition curator. He also works as a film producer and radio journalist.



My work includes film editing, exhibition-concept writing and numerous Zoom meetings – in short sitting at a desk and staring at several computer screens most of the day. It also means focusing, brainstorming and working towards deadlines, as well as interacting with many people.

Iyengar Yoga classes, led by IYMV's highly dedicated teachers, have helped keep me sane throughout this difficult period, although I have been lucky to work throughout Covid times. One of the projects I have collaborated on during this period, the exhibition 'Roots and Changes – Gujarati Influences', opened in April 2021 in Brent, North London.

For the last 20 years I have been practising Iyengar Yoga. It gives me peace of mind and a better balance in life – I feel I can leave the rat race for a while. Yoga helps maintain a healthy body and minimises the unhealthy side effects of sitting and staring at a screen, such as lower back pain, muscle pain and strained eyes.

Another important benefit is that it helps me focus on whatever I am doing. Even before I schedule my work for the week, I think about my yoga classes and book them online. Although Zoom classes cannot replace live yoga sessions, the enforced stay at home has had a positive effect: I have been able to intensify my practice, 'upgrading' from two to three yoga sessions a week!

www.rolfkillius.com

www.rootsandchangesgujaratiinfluences.com

Matthew Sturgis

Matthew Sturgis is a historian and biographer.



Being a writer has many pleasures and rewards, but it is not good for the posture. Days spent bent over books and papers take their toll on the lower back, the hamstrings, the shoulders – and, indeed, all the things that connect them. It was with this in mind that I allowed myself to be bounced (by my wife) into taking up Iyengar Yoga some five years ago. It has been a revelation of pleasure, and a certain amount of pain, putting me in touch with long-neglected outposts of my creaking frame. Although still very much a 'beginner' – and still unable to touch my toes – I am daily reminded of how much worse off I would be if I hadn't embarked on this journey.

I strive, not always successfully, to still my mind during the lessons. My best moments come when doing shoulderstands at the 'Institute': I love looking up, past my feet, to the skylights, and seeing the clouds scudding by. It is always good to have a new perspective on things.

Walter Sickert: A Life, 2005

Oscar: A Life, 2018

ROOM(S) WITH A VIEW

(to Practise Yoga): an Architect's Perspective

Tony Fretton

At Iyengar Yoga Maida Vale

The 'Institute' building in Maida Vale has a durable charm. It is in the Minimalist style that was developed in the late 1980s by designers such as John Pawson and Claudio Sylvestrin. The building at Maida Vale was designed later, around 1992 by Russell Gray, Hitesh Dhorajiwala and Ainsley O'Connor of the design practice Shiva, and departs from strict minimalism in its oak lattice door and Portland Stone facade.

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There are also rituals such as the slow circulation of a class through the equipment cupboard to collect a chair or stool and then to leave by the other door next to the skeleton.

The studios have a quiet beauty, with high windows on two sides and areas of glass brick facing Paddington Recreation Ground and tennis courts. The view from Studio 1 through the window behind the teachers' platform is to the gardens of Randolph Avenue. The building was blessed by Guruji himself in a ceremony in 1997 led by Gerry Chambers and other senior teachers, when Guruji's assistant walked through the aisle



with a flame over which some of us put our hands to catch the blessing. The meaning of buildings, and of this building in particular, is given by such significant events in combination with the general experience when taking classes. This consists of the quality of light through the windows and sounds from the tennis courts as well as rain drumming on the skylights. Also there is the scattering of leaves on the roof lights, seen especially when lying on the back or when opening the eyes after Savasana.

All buildings have idiosyncrasies. In studio 1 if you sit near the teachers' platform, you cannot see too well and Patanjali's statue stands close in front of you. On the other side of the dais there is a fire extinguisher at eye level with a picture of Guruji in Padmasana above it. The building's idiosyncrasies are embraced by regular class goers. I usually sit at the front where I can hear, but then I cannot see. The spaces either side of the doors into the studios are taken by those who do not want to be too visible.

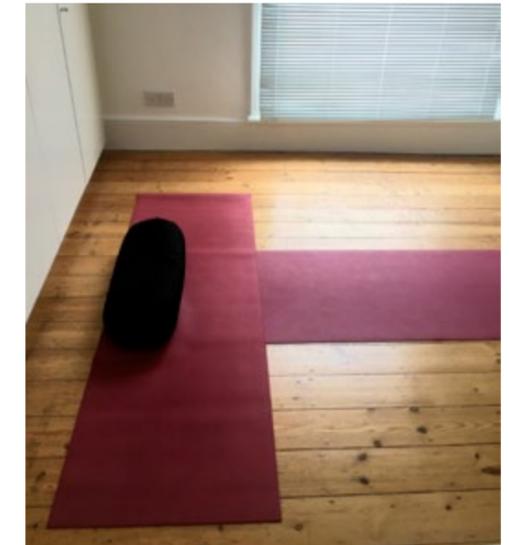
Some regularly gravitate to the side of the studios where the ropes are situated and others choose the opposite side, trying to avoid the cold glass brick panels or actively choosing them because their bodies overheat when practising. There are also rituals such as the slow circulation of a class through the equipment cupboard to collect a chair or stool and then to leave by the other door next to the skeleton. And then there are the additions that occur in every building, which are often unconscious of the building's underlying style: the reception desk that looks like a packing case, the clocks above the doors, the frieze of Guruji's photos, racks with people's bags and coats.

It was strange to return to the studios in the break between lockdowns. The floor was marked into territories that stretched far back through both studios and the equipment was uncomfortably on view because all the separations between the studios and the equipment room had been opened up.

At Home

Livestream is another experience entirely. It has led to me taking more classes and bonding with different teachers, while continuing with my former teacher. Attending livestream classes at home has also created another pattern of rituals. Before a class at 8.30 in the morning I have to think of eating something small, like oat milk and honey with a few grains of muesli, consoling myself with a large brunch after. For a class in the evening, I have to condition myself to stop and prepare my mind so that I do not carry my work into class. I lay out my mats in a T shape to accommodate the different ways that teachers will want to view our postures. I am lucky to have a study in my house, with a plain, boarded floor, white walls and a large west-facing sash window, which lights the room beautifully. There is a chair and a simple table with a few pictures

propped up on it. It is where I work and where I practise yoga each day. Since taking livestream classes I have gradually reduced the items that relate to work to equalise its character as a place for yoga. After a livestream session at home there is a level of privacy and reflection that is not available after a class at the 'Institute'. There I frequently have coffee with a classmate afterwards and then cycle home.



Yehudi Menuhin, in his foreword to *Light on Yoga*, talks of the deepening effect of practice: "The practice of Yoga induces a primary sense of measure and proportion. Reduced to our own body, our first instrument, we learn to play it, drawing from it maximum resonance and harmony. With unflagging patience we refine and animate every cell as we return daily to the attack, unlocking and liberating capacities otherwise condemned to frustration and death."

Continuity of teaching makes that possible, and I am truly grateful to IYMV and its teachers for keeping classes going throughout the time of lockdown.

Interview with Richard Agar Ward

Richard Agar Ward is one of the most senior and long-standing teachers at IYMV. Here he shares his yoga beginnings and his first meeting with Guruji with us.

When and why did you start yoga?

I have been asked this question before and I often say, truthfully, that I started becoming interested in yoga because of William Shakespeare. When I say that, people naturally assume that I somehow uniquely found mention of or reference to it amongst Shakespeare's *Collected Works*. While it is true to say that Shakespeare addresses some of the same ontological and teleological questions dealt with in the philosophical literature of yoga, the truth of the matter is much more prosaic.

I first became interested in yoga in 1970 when I was a schoolboy. I had never heard of it as far as I remember until I noticed a book called *Teach Yourself Yoga* belonging to a boy who was in the same boarding house at school. The book was part of a series of self-educational imprints popular at the time. The boy to whom the book belonged was none other than a namesake of the Bard of Stratford-upon-Avon, William Shakespeare. William was a very quiet, introverted boy whose parents at some stage had sought psychological treatment for what they considered an excessive manifestation of these qualities in their son. For whatever reasons, it was recommended to him that he should take up the electric guitar, at which he became highly proficient (specialising in a passionate rendition of "The House Of The Rising Sun"), and yoga, through the use of this book.



William lacked interest in the book, as far as I could tell, and agreed to give me a long-term loan of it, and I read it.

Two things became immediately apparent. First, that yoga was an awesome ancient Indian philosophical and metaphysical system and culture which dealt with all aspects of the human embodiment both gross and subtle and, second, that I had not the faintest hope of being able to teach myself the subject. It was clear that acolytes would need to start with attaining some bodily positions but when I tried a few of them at home in the holidays I quickly became confused and realised I did not know how to make any serious attempt at anything. For an absolute beginner like me it became obvious that teaching myself was out of the question. What progress could I possibly make? For an empirical subject, a language as exotic as Hungarian, for example, a *Teach Yourself* book was a worthwhile guide, but it seemed unhelpful for anything as practical as yoga. I then resolved that one day I would find some way of taking lessons in the subject. The book made no mention whatsoever of the concept of a "Guru" but it became clear that finding one would be my only chance.

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I then resolved that one day I would find some way of taking lessons in the subject.

I also had less prosaic reasons for becoming interested in yoga and this relates to the fact that it spoke of both life and death and saw life in this world as part of a continuity. The Christianity I was brought up with seemed very vague on the subject beyond a sort of “jam tomorrow” approach as part of a bargain bestowed in return for belief and commitment. Even at that young age, I felt there had to be something more meaningful. Death had been part of my life. My twin sister died when we were born, for which my mother grieved deeply. As soon as I became conscious of my own thoughts I knew about and thought about death and have continued to contemplate it every single day of my life since, without exaggeration. I don’t ever remember having been told about my twin. I don’t think I needed to be. I cried inconsolably every single night of my life until I was two, according to my mother, and the local GP suggested it was due to grief for my twin, all other causes having been discounted. Not long after my first interest in yoga, another sister, an older one, died. It seemed to me that you needed a coherent approach to the matter of life and death in order to negotiate life, and yoga seemed to me to be fit for this purpose. Both these things remain true to this day.

How was your first meeting with Guruji?

My first encounter with Guruji came in July 1976. He was visiting England on his way back from a visit to the USA and on that day taught morning and afternoon classes at Cecil Sharp House (www.cecilsharp.org) near Primrose Hill and Regents Park in London. I had started learning his yoga in the autumn of 1975, while in my second year at Oxford University. My teacher, Kofi Busia, booked a group of his pupils into the classes. In those days we did not know BKS Iyengar as “Guruji”, a title that gained common currency some ten years later. From the start we pupils attended classes of “yoga as taught by Sri BKS Iyengar”. He was referred to simply as “Mr Iyengar”, an epithet that seems inadequate now but that was what was used then. The term “Iyengar Yoga” was also yet to be coined. Guruji had already achieved widespread recognition as the author of *Light on Yoga*, published ten years previously. At that time his remaining remarkable literary output, and worldwide recognition, fame and acclamation, were still to follow. Whatever stature he had then was there to be seen by the people around him, and in much more personal terms, not yet with the modern-day, very famous and public, indeed iconic aura we are now so familiar with.

In those days it is no exaggeration to say that Guruji had a reputation as a strict disciplinarian; this was possibly the most discussed, even the major preoccupation surrounding his teaching. People reacted to this approach in various ways. For some it was very difficult to see that his demands on his pupils were fair. To others, these demands were, on the contrary, not at all personal but a product of his extraordinary devotion to yoga and an insistence that any pupil of his should pay yoga the utmost respect as a divine art and science.

The classes at Cecil Sharp House were somewhat unusual in so far as they not only had participants both morning and afternoon, but an audience of several score as well, who sat on three sides of the very large room serving as the classroom. As I entered the classroom early that afternoon, I encountered my yoga-pupil colleague Phil, who had watched the morning's class. For some unaccountable reason, so I thought, he revealed a desperate, shocked pallor in his face. "What's up?" I asked. "He ... he's a madman!" declared Phil, who could say little more beyond this. "Interesting," I thought to myself, unimpressed and indifferent, as only a 20-year-old can be, "I will have to see for myself."

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Guruji combined a remarkable skill and depth of knowledge of the human body with a distinct flair for showmanship, being ever conscious of the audience as well as his pupils.

While all the participants roamed around, assembled and prepared in various ways on the floor of the classroom (note that there were no such things as yoga mats or equipment in those days for people to pass their time staking out their territory) there was no sign of Mr Iyengar. Then, quite unannounced and unobtrusively, he entered the hall at the far end and stopped, head a little raised, without looking at anyone, almost as if he was sniffing the atmosphere. He was garbed in what I thought was a singularly inappropriate, garish Hawaiian shirt resplendent with palm trees. Clearly Hawaii had been a stop on his American tour.

For a moment I thought: "Can this be the author of *Light on Yoga*, in this remarkable shirt?" A moment later he took off his shirt and stood before us ready to start the class. In that split second, I felt I saw him as exactly that author of *Light on Yoga* and in that moment I realised from deep inside that there was nothing to fear and that I could trust this person completely. To me it was a remarkable transformation before my eyes.

The class lasted some three hours. Guruji combined a remarkable skill and depth of knowledge of the human body with a distinct flair for showmanship, being ever conscious of the audience as well as his pupils. We had the sense of him always reaching out with yoga to as many people as possible. The more people present, the more he reached out. What he taught for us as individuals had a public presentation and we pupils were part of that presentation.

There was of course no hiding place. In Sirsasana everyone who could stay up on his or her own did so, without support. Some teachers were called to give support in the middle of the room to those who could not stay up alone. Not far from where I was wobbling unsupported, and near the end of what seemed a very long time in Sirsasana, a teacher, the late Penny Nield-Smith, allowed her charge to come down from headstand. Guru stormed over. "Why did you let her come down?" he roared. "She was tired," came Penny's reply. "She was not tired," Guruji retorted, and without turning to look (so I was told later) slapped my leg at which point I fell over harmlessly. "He was tired, she was not!" This engaged the audience wonderfully.

During Paschimottanasana Guruji announced to all that while in the pose one could bear any weight on one's back in the same manner as a horse can carry great loads. He was very close to my legs as he said this and once he finished, he stepped up to stand on my back. My progress was very rapid and complete. "How does that feel?" he demanded. I raised my head enough to exclaim "Marvellous," which indeed it was. The hall erupted with mirth.

Being taught by Guruji was not without its difficulties. Foremost among these, from my perspective, was my unfamiliarity with the Indian accent and his way of expressing himself in English. While doing Utthita Parsvakonasana he strode over to me and uttered an instruction. I was unable to catch his words at all. I had however caught the dynamics of his teaching enough to realise that it would be near fatal to ask him to repeat himself or to say that I could not understand his accent. In response, I tried to make every adjustment I knew. I failed to make the correct one, of course, so he kicked me on the inside of my bent leg thigh. All I could offer him was a rather pathetic "I didn't understand". Off he stalked, kicking this person here and that person there, barking: "Did you understand? He didn't understand. Did you understand?" It was an episode usually best forgotten but here best remembered.

Without so much as a wall to use as a prop we were orchestrated to do some poses in novel ways. Virabhadrasana 3 was performed in chains with one pupil supporting hands on the back of the person in front and extending one's back leg on the back of the person behind. Remarkably it worked. I was using Angela Farmer, a very well-known teacher, as my front prop but I forget who my rear prop was!



It is a curious feature of memory that some episodes from that day have remained with me vividly for decades, but other details have been lost in the recesses of my memory archives, perhaps never to reemerge. Nevertheless, I like to think that the memories I have retained are the most interesting and personally resonant. The following year I was in Pune at RIMYI for my first intensive course with Guruji.

(The second part of this interview is a slightly edited version of one which first appeared in Beloved Guruji, Mumbai (2016), 63ff, with kind permission of the publishers.)

The First Public Iyengar Yoga Class in the UK

A blue plaque for a house in London?

Korinna Pilafidis-Williams



In a quiet, leafy street in North London there stands an Edwardian house where BKS Iyengar taught his first public classes in the UK. They did not take place in a grand sports hall or dedicated studio but in the sitting room and the garden of a family house in Finchley, London N3 in the early 1960s. (Some of you may have heard of Finchley as it was the constituency of a certain Margaret Thatcher.) As I live within walking distance of Fitzalan Road, I was keen to find the exact house. I knew it had been the headquarters of the Asian Music Circle (AMC), which was founded by Indian-born Ayana Angadi and his wife, Patricia Angadi (née Fell-Clark) in 1946, but all available information on the exact house number turned out to be wrong.



Clockwise from bottom left: Cliff (Diana Clifton's husband), unknown, Angela Marris, Beatrice Harthan, unknown, Doreen Dahl, unknown, Ayana Angadi, BKS Iyengar, Shankara Angadi (standing), unknown, unknown, unknown, unknown, Diana Clifton, Daphne Pick, unknown, Silva Mehta

Over the next four years I searched for the house number extensively and even tried old census publications, but to no avail. The breakthrough came when I was chatting to a friend and fellow yoga teacher, Ginny Owen, in Bristol. Cleverly, she took an indirect route, looking not for the owner's name but for some of the well-known musicians who visited

the AMC, specifically in a biography of the world-famous Indian musician Ravi Shankar. Finally, I had found it – the house number!!! I used one of my 'lockdown' walks for a recce. There it was: a house with a largish garden at the back and a fence that looked exactly the same as in the old photos we have.

“

It was a cold 'lockdown' Sunday but I was overjoyed. It felt like meeting a long-lost relative or solving a mystery.

What next? Well, rather than ring the bell, I decided to write a letter to the current owners explaining that I was working on an article for *Dipika* and giving them my email address. Lo and behold, I received a reply on the same afternoon. It was a cold 'lockdown' Sunday but I was overjoyed. It felt like meeting a long-lost relative or solving a mystery. It turned out that the house was now occupied by a young family, who had only moved in a few years ago. I was also delighted to hear that they were of Indian heritage. From the title deeds of the house, they were aware that it had been the seat of the AMC but had no idea about its yoga background.

Let me tell you a bit more about this house and its history...
Certainly for us, the fact that

Guruji taught there has the greatest significance but famous Indian musicians like the above-mentioned sitar player Ravi Shankar, and the sarod player (a lute-like instrument) Ustad Ali Akbar Khan, played there when they were still relatively unknown in the West. We all know the sweet sound of The Beatles' 'Norwegian Wood', in which George Harrison plays the sitar. The story goes that when Harrison broke a sitar string, he was told to contact Mr Angadi to get a replacement. According to the Angadis' eldest son, Shankara, the whole family delivered the new string to EMI's Abbey Road studios. Harrison went on to become a regular visitor to the AMC and indeed he and Patti Boyd, his wife, had their portrait painted by Patricia Fell-Angadi, the owner of the house.

You may ask what the connection is to Guruji? Let us go back to the most influential supporter of BKS Iyengar, Yehudi Menuhin. In an interview conducted by BBC producer Vanessa Harrison, Angela Marris, the secretary of the AMC and one of Guruji's first students, recounts how Guruji met Menuhin (*Dipika* vol. 40, 2008, pp.15-19). It was 1952, Menuhin was visiting India and he showed Jawaharlal Nehru (India's prime minister) that he could do a headstand. The father of Indian Independence was not impressed and told Menuhin that he needed to have lessons with the

"best yoga teacher in India, BKS Iyengar". So began a legendary friendship between the musician and the yogi. Menuhin invited Guruji to teach him in Switzerland and London and then, as a patron of the AMC, he suggested that Guruji should teach a group of students at the Angadi family home. In the same interview, Angela Marris recounts that she was asked to organise the first class and to invite some students. It was mainly students from the AMC "who came because you only had to mention Yehudi's name to them and, well, they'd come".



Clockwise from left: BKS Iyengar, Ayana Angadi, Chandrika Angadi, Robert Masters, Patricia Angadi, Yehudi Menuhin, Angela Marris, Dominic Angadi

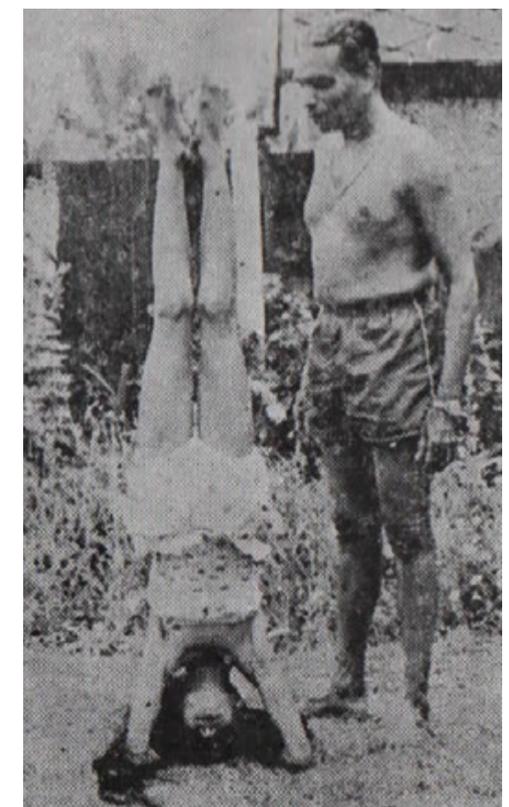


Guruji adjusting Jacqueline du Pré. Left: Beatrice Harthan

The first class took place in the sitting room of the Finchley house on the evening of Monday June 19th, 1961 (*Dipika* vol. 43, 2011, p.19). It can be called the birthday of Iyengar Yoga in Britain. One of his first students at the class was the late Diana Clifton (1919-2015), who was also interviewed by Vanessa Harrison (in 1999, manuscript in the archives of IYMV). Asked how she came to be at this first class she said: "I found out that Mr Iyengar was in the country and teaching at the AMC in Finchley. I rung through feeling rather nervous because I didn't think I would be especially selected as I had only been practising from a book. The President of the AMC, Mr Angadi, said I should come as he had also only practised from a book.... When my husband dropped me at the house, he sat outside in the car. He said to me: "If there is any trouble, wave a handkerchief out of the window and I will come.'"

In the first class there were just three students, Silva Mehta (one of the founders of the Iyengar Yoga Institute, London), Angela Marris and Diana Clifton. In Vanessa Harrison's interview, Diana continues her memories of this first class: "I found him [BKS Iyengar] charming, really, he was quite firm with the way we were taught. He asked whether I could stand on my head and when I said that I can, he asked me to do it there. No blankets? So, he just threw a cushion on the floor. When I said that I could only do it to the wall, he replied: 'I am better than the wall, I've got hands, I've got arms, do it here!' So, I did."

At the next class there were more students, including the pianist Clifford Curzon, the violinist Robert Masters, the cellist Jacqueline du Pré and Beatrice Harthan, who helped to get *Light on Yoga* published in the UK (see *Dipika*, vol. 48, 2016, p.1ff). Daphne Pick, another yoga teacher who was at the early classes and also lived on Fitzalan Road, explained in a written account (kindly provided to me by Lorna Walker, former editor of *Dipika*) how she came to attend the class. Chandrika, the Angadis' daughter, was friends with her son. One day the eight-year-old skipped into Daphne's house and said: "Mr. Yogi man's coming on Saturday, the charge is 50p per lesson."



Chandrika in Sirsasana

The number of students increased over the following weeks, until the classes had to take place in the garden for lack of space inside. BKS Iyengar stayed with the Angadi family and often conducted two classes: one in the morning when musicians attended as they had to perform in the evening and another class in the evening. The 'regular' students consisted of Diana Clifton, Angela Marris, Silva Mehta, Eilean Moon and Daphne Pick, who all practised regularly once a week. They paid half a crown until they got 60 pounds together to buy an air ticket for Mr Iyengar to return the following year. In 1962, Guruji



Angela Marris and Beatrice Harthan

authorised these students to teach others, as long as they taught in pairs to support each other. They were therefore his first 'qualified' teachers (from the above-mentioned unpublished interview of Diana Clifton by Vanessa Harrison).



60th Anniversary class, 19 June 2021

Sixty years later almost to the month, the current owners of the house have asked me for some private yoga lessons. I am extremely moved by the prospect that yoga will once more be taught there. It makes a perfect cycle. I will leave it up to you to decide whether or not the house should have a blue plaque.

Acknowledgements:

It has been a real detective story and I have asked many people for information so am grateful to all of them. I am indebted to Bhavna and Sam, the current owners of the house. They opened their garden at 11am on 19 June 2021 for Penny Chaplin, the UK's most senior teacher and early pupil of BKS Iyengar, to teach a class to a few local students. The rain stopped and we recreated the 1961 photo in colour, with and without mats on the wet grass. It was a most moving experience.

I have also managed to contact two of the children of the Angadi family, Shankara and Chandrika. They generously helped me with the identification of some of the people in the garden photo and also named the AMC resident photographer, Jack Blake, who possibly took the original image. Shankara was sixteen in the original photo and can be seen standing at the back. We included him in the new photo too, standing against the new extension, which was added to the building in recent years. His wife Marina kindly took most of the photos of the day.

Here is some further reading:

[Patricia Angadi >](#)

On George Harrison and the Angadis: Reginald Massey, *Azaadi!: Stories and Histories of the Indian Subcontinent After Independence*, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, NCT, 2005, p.56.

[Patricia Angadi's portrait of George Harrison and Patti Boyd >](#)

[Yehudi Menuhin, Jawaharlal Nehru and BKS Iyengar \(BBC 15.11.2000\) >](#)

For the friendship between Yehudi Menuhin and BKS Iyengar:

Suzanne Newcombe, *Yoga in Britain*, p.88ff.

The Human Life Cycle Illustrated by Asanas

Text by Korinna Pilafidis-Williams
Illustrations by Alice Chadwick



ADHO MUKHA VIRASANA

Childhood

ADHO MUKHA VIRASANA child's pose

CHATURANGASANA starting to move on all fours

TADASANA standing up, standing on two feet,
this brings the ability to grow



TADASANA

Late Childhood to Young Adulthood

VRKSASANA branching out and growing physically
and emotionally

SURYA NAMASKAR the highs and lows of teenagers

TRIKONASANA spreading out to make new experiences

VIRABHADRASANA 2 looking right and left to find a path



VRKSASANA



VIRABHADRASANA 2

Adulthood

VIRABHADRASANA 1 looking up in life or to a
role model (training or further education)

VIRABHADRASANA 3 taking off in a career,
extending to the maximum, flying

UTTANASANA recovery but also exhaustion and failures

SIRSASANA learning to see things from another perspective

DHANURASANA fun and wellbeing, opening up
and being challenged

MARICHYASANA 1 family and work take over,
feeling wrapped up

MARICHYASANA 3 midlife, needing more or something
different, turning and 'churning'; difficult at the time
but brings cleansing and change

SARVANGASANA taking stock of one's
life, contemplation and cooling off

Late Adulthood

SIDDHASANA sitting still and resting in retirement

JANU SIRSASANA resting but also being challenged
with new interests

PASCHIMOTTANASANA & HALASANA rolling forwards
and backwards, fun and quiet time in retirement

SETU BANDHA SARVANGASANA bridging to the next life

SAVASANA MRTASANA passing to death



VIRABHADRASANA 3



DHANURASANA



JANU SIRSASANA



SETU BANDHA SARVANGASANA

THE ARMPIT CHEST IN IYENGAR YOGA

Alice Chadwick

What is the Armpit Chest?

The 'armpit chest' is one of those terms specific to Iyengar Yoga, rich in meaning, helpful in teaching, but perhaps slightly mystifying to those new to the practice. "Open the armpits", we might hear. "Make them tall", "coil the armpit chest". Beginners may experience a moment of uncertainty when told to put their thumbs in their armpits and lift them up.

The armpit chest is the region of the upper side chest and includes the side ribs, the intercostal muscles between them and the skin of the side chest. To get space and lift here is one of the great benefits of yoga. Many of our foundational poses work on finding this freedom, while others become quite different (or indeed possible) when this area has opened up.

Waking up the Armpit Chest

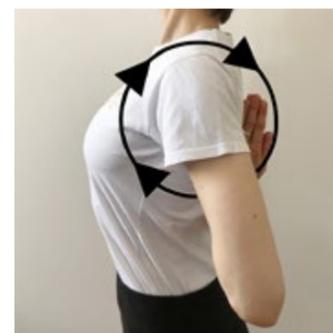
Shoulderwork is one of the ways we learn to access the armpit chest. Urdhva Hastasana, Urdhva Baddhanguliyasana and Gomukhasana, done at the beginning of a class, all bring immediate openness. We learn a vertical lift, lengthening through the side trunk and expanding the armpits. Paschima Namaskarasana is particularly effective (illus. 1a), because having the hands on the back helps move the dorsal in, assisting the opening of the front chest. A more dynamic 'coiling action' can be learnt here, with the skin of the front armpit moving up, the shoulders back and down and the skin of the back of the shoulder/armpit rolling downwards, creating a circular movement like the turning of a wheel.

A Three-dimensional Action

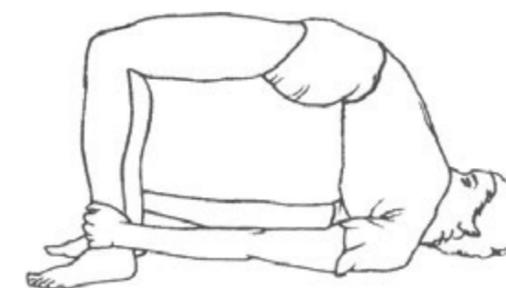
As we advance, we learn that this movement involves the whole circumference of the torso. To see photos or film of BKS Iyengar standing or walking about is to appreciate the dynamic ascension of the full barrel of his chest. Starting low down in the back ribs (they move in), the spine lengthens, the shoulder blades move in and down, the sternum bone moves forward and lifts and the collar bones spread. We recognise a 'back-chest-to-front-chest' feeling and experience an internal lift from the pelvic floor as the abdomen is drawn in and up.

Coiling the armpit chest is often done without lifting the arms or stretching the armpits bottom-to-top at all. Chatush Padasana (illus. 1b) is instructive here: although the arms stretch to the ankles, partly 'closing' the armpits, the armpit chest must still open and lift. Learning to distinguish the part of the armpit skin that 'belongs to' the arms, from the part that 'belongs to' (and is mobilised by) the back muscles and shoulder bones is key. Once this has been understood, the full volume of the chest can be activated whatever position the arms take. "Don't let your arms sleep on your armpits" is an instruction Guruji gave (for seated twists), reminding students to retain life and lift even with the arms down.

The armpit chest movement does not happen in isolation – the counterbalancing work in the pelvis and legs is key. In postures with the most intense expression (Ustrasana or Urdhva Dhanurasana), the feet, legs, hip bones, tailbone and sacrum together provide the stability which both grounds and releases the coiling of the upper body.



1a Paschima Namaskarasana



1b Chatush Padasana

Benefits of the Armpit chest Action

1. Improving our Asanas

Understanding the armpit chest can improve our yoga, giving us access to sensations and movements which allow our asanas to better unfold. The 'back-body-to-front-body' feeling teaches the opening of the chest required in all the standing poses, from Trikonasana and Ardha Chandrasana to Virabhadrasana I (illus. 2a). "Be sharp in the armpits" is a Pune instruction for Virabhadrasana 3 and the coiling action powerfully charges all the Virabhadrasana poses, bringing their shape and energy into focus.

Perhaps most obviously, coiling is central to our backbends – think of the powerful lift and roll required to go into Ustrasana (illus. 2b), or the great forwards/upwards push of the side chest through the arms in Urdhva Muhka Svanasana. The armpit-

chest action helps delivers freedom, lightness and movement to the whole spine (particularly the dorsal) that is necessary in these backbending poses.

Sensitivity to the armpit chest can also transform our forward bends (including standing ones, like Uttanasana), lending concavity to the back and a harmonious, three-dimensional flow of the whole torso forwards. In upright twists such as Bharadvajasana (illus. 2c), coiling, with an awareness that the sides of the armpit chest must lift equally and the whole barrel of the chest rotate, can help us avoid the common difficulties of collapsing one side of the trunk or burying the sternum. Doing this pose on a chair encourages broadness, as well as a good coiling lift.



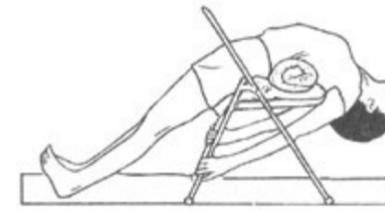
2a Virabhadrasana 1



2b Ustrasana



2c Bharadvajasana



3a Dwi Pada Viparita Dandasana



3b Setu Bandha



3c Chair Sarvangasana

We often use props to boost and sustain the armpit chest action.

In chair Dwi Pada Viparita Dandasana (illus. 3a), the edge of the seat connects to the shoulder blades and helps initiate and support the coiling movement (see page 42, back-bench article). In recuperative poses such as Setu Bandha Sarvangasana (illus. 3b), support creates an armpit chest profile with good height and spread. As scientist and yoga teacher Roger Cole has demonstrated, raising the heart above the head stimulates the baroreflex, encouraging the heart to slow down and the brain to become quiet. (Restorative Yoga - How to Use the Baroreflex to Relax More Deeply) To maximise this effect, the armpit chest must be properly

positioned and 'charged' – it is, in other words, central in gaining the pose's full recuperative benefits. While all the inversions need the lift and circular dynamism of the armpit chest, the use of support in chair Sarvangasana (illus. 3c) helps maximise engagement (with the sacrum supported behind the line of the shoulders, the coiling action intensifies). By gripping the chair, access to the back ribs improves, lending additional height to the torso and delivering the chest towards the chin; with the arms relaxed by the head, the whole area expands.

“

With the armpit chest activated, our emotional centre simply cannot collapse.

2. Lifting Depression

One intriguing comment made about the armpit chest is the suggestion that by lifting it up, we also lift our spirits. Senior teacher Patricia Walden describes her experience: “I met Mr Iyengar when I was around 25, when I was not in a good place – I was suffering from depression. My first class with him, he made a statement that I’ll never forget. We were doing Tadasana, and he said, ‘If you open your armpits, you’ll never get depressed.’”

The relationship between physical and mental health may be one of the reasons many of us stick with yoga. With the armpit chest activated, our emotional centre simply cannot collapse. We must stand tall and the heart, both physical and emotional, can begin to lift and recover.

In working the arms to access the armpit chest, we release tension in the neck and shoulders, the area where stress accumulates. Armpit-chest work also encourages the development of a bigger, broader chest cavity, allowing us to slow our breath down and avoid the rapid, shallow pattern associated with anxiety.

This understanding can be life changing. For Patricia Walden, practising backbends allowed her to pierce through her darkness and inertia. In the workshops she now runs to address depression, she uses postures with the specific focus of ‘lifting the chest, expanding the consciousness of the chest, maintaining the lift in the armpits’.

3. “Small Armpits, Small Brain!”

An improved mental state can extend to mental clarity. During the 2018 IYUK convention, Jayne Orton shared a phrase she often heard Guruji use: “Small armpits, small brain!” The idea that by enlarging the armpits, with the accompanying lift of the spine and expansion of the lungs, we give the brain and the nervous system the space and oxygen they require to be alert and present makes good sense. “Be sharp in the armpits” is an instruction we have noted. There is a sense in which by seeking to be big, sharp and awake in the armpit chest we are also searching for clarity and capaciousness in the mind.

The three-dimensionality of the armpit chest is mirrored, then, in its all-encompassing impact on our mental state. It is *chitta*, the mind in the round, that is being lit up. Jayne Orton puts it this way: “When Guruji said ‘small brain’ it means the consciousness or awareness is not fully open and ‘blossoming’ as it can in yoga. Somehow you definitely feel a lightening and opening of the brain when you open the armpits.” This is amplified by one of Guruji’s most resonant phrases: “Open the eyes of the armpit chest”. In opening wide here in every direction, can we achieve a clearer, fuller, deeper inner vision?

“

When Guruji said ‘small brain’ it means the consciousness or awareness is not fully open and ‘blossoming’ as it can in yoga.

4. Lymphatic System

As the pandemic has highlighted, the lymphatic system is of primary importance to our health. Lymph nodes, which activate our immune response and filter out bacteria and viruses, are concentrated in the armpits (with other clusters in the neck and groins). The thymus gland, one of the primary organs of the lymphatic system, also comes within the sphere of the armpit chest (behind the sternum). The lymphatic system needs to be actively stimulated to function well. In this sense, restorative poses alone are not enough. The energetic use of the arms in standing poses does, however, stimulate the armpit/lymphatic nexus. We have noted the powerful work required by the Virabhadrasana postures; think too of the vigorous rotation of the ribcage in Parsvakonasana. The dynamic sequence of Surya Namaskar (sun salutation) also brings the sort of movement that successfully stimulates lymphatic activity. Viparita Karani is a classic pose for lymphatic drainage, which is helped by the inversion and the opening of the armpit chest.

The internal lift that comes with the armpit chest action gives a boost to other important systems in the body as well. The reproductive and digestive systems, and the muscular organ of the heart, are all lifted, toned and stimulated by this work.

5. Storehouse of Prana

In Iyengar Yoga, the armpits are considered the 'storehouse' of *prana* (breath, energy, life force). If we slump forwards, closing the upper chest and collapsing the side ribs, lung capacity is greatly reduced. In contrast, when we expand the armpit chest – Supta Baddha Konasana on a bolster, for example, arms over the head – we make ample space, increasing both the quantity and the quality of breath available. For this reason, armpit chest-opening poses are done before pranayama; we also use props under the chest in Supine Pranayama (illus. 3d). Here folded

blankets create a gentle coiling lift, allowing the ribcage to spread and the capacity of the breath to be explored. With practice, the pranayamic inhalation can be used to engage the armpit chest, consciously moving the side ribs and intercostal muscles. Gradually, we grow sensitive to the touch of the breath on the inner sidewalls of the chest.



3d Supine Pranayama

In Savasana, the activation of the armpit chest is of primary importance, providing space for the lungs to recharge the body after practice. It may well be here that the coiling sensation is most fully experienced, particularly by new students. We hold the sides of the mat (or raise the forearms up and press the elbows down), lifting the front armpit skin up, rolling the shoulders backwards and taking the shoulder blades down the back. The arms are positioned away from the sides of the armpit chest and the upper arms roll out. The limbs grow heavy and the body descends, but a muscle memory of the armpit-chest action should remain – a certain space and lightness beneath the shoulder blades. With this careful preparation, the lungs can work without obstruction. The new is drawn in, the old expelled; life-giving *prana* can flow.

The armpit chest is, then, one of our great resources, a powerhouse of physical and mental energy, acuity, resilience and health. For the lungs, lymphatic system, heart and brain, finding freedom and movement here is critical. As students of yoga, understanding its proper action can help us sharpen our poses. Discovering its inner potential can bring light and lightness to the core of our being.

All illustrations (except Paschima Namaskarasana) from Geeta S. Iyengar, Yoga in Action, Preliminary Course and Yoga in Action, Intermediate Course-1, YOG, Mumbai, 2000 & 2013

THE VIPARITA DANDASANA BENCH (BACK-BENCH)

The full asana of Dwi Pada Viparita Dandasana is either performed coming up from the floor through Urdhva Dhanurasana, after which the hands and arms are placed into a Sirsasana position, or dropping back from Sirsasana into a backbend. For people who cannot execute the full asana, because of a stiffer spine or neck or a medical condition, props are used, allowing them to benefit from this intense backbend. In our practice, a yoga chair is commonly employed because it supports the trunk from the lower shoulder blades to the buttocks and so encourages the natural curve of the spine (see page 37). Often the legs are elevated and the feet placed against a wall. With age, it becomes even more important to perform backbends in order to fight against gravity, which causes the body to bend forward. The chair enables us to hold this backbend for longer, relieving spinal stiffness and encouraging a strong chest opening, which aids the anterior stretch of the body and its organs. Dwi Pada Viparita Dandasana (supported and unsupported) is a prime pose to counteract depression.

BKS Iyengar saw a need for a prop many years ago. He experimented with a road roller, stretching backwards over it. He also extended over a steel water drum but realised that steel was not an ideal surface and the drum did not follow the anatomical shape of the spine. He then attempted the pose on circular stools with blankets on them. His students liked this because they could experience relaxation and extension at the same time. Finally, he came up with the design for the prop now most commonly referred to as the 'Viparita Dandasana bench'. This follows



the contour of the spine and has rungs to slide down vertebra by vertebra. It also has a ledge at the foot end to press the heels or toes against. Pushing the feet into something helps the chest ascend. The back of the head and neck release backwards and downwards, with a bolster or blanket usually added for support under the head or behind the neck. While the chest is elevated, the legs, pelvis and head are lower down (below the chest). Hence it is often used as an alternative for Sirsasana for women on their period. The original use of the bench has many therapeutic applications and can also be used in a different orientation for the so-called 'L-shaped' poses (www.loissteinberg.com/l-shapes).

It is probably one of the most ingenious props Guruji invented and has become indispensable in Iyengar Yoga studios.

Iyengar Yoga in Action

Wendy McGuire

In May 2020, during the early days of a global pandemic, yet another Black man, George Floyd, was murdered by a police officer in America. The aftermath of this act continues to ricochet around the world.

Prompted by this event, a South London Iyengar Yoga teacher, Priscila Diniz, gathered together a group of teachers keen to do something to support the statement 'Black Lives Matter'. Iyengar Yoga in Action (IYiA) was born. The group has expanded and now includes teachers and students from across the UK. We have run three days of workshops, aimed at raising awareness of the Black Lives Matter statement and its relevance to Iyengar Yoga, and raised more than £10,000 for charities working with Black communities. There is a Facebook page – www.facebook.com/IyengarYogainAction – with links to many interesting articles, speeches and videos. The group aims to set up a website in the not-too-distant future.



There have been some hiccups along the way, with an initial lack of support from IYUK for our activities. The original group set up by the IYUK to look at equality and diversity within IYUK was disbanded, due to the sabotaging actions of one of its members. However, we are delighted that a new Equity Committee has been established, with representation on the main IYUK Board, rightly placing the fight for equity at the core of all that IYUK does. IYiA, working with the IYUK Events Team and the Equity Committee, and in association with Challenge Consultancy, recently organised an excellent and well-attended free session of diversity training as part of the 2021 UK convention.

The most recent fundraising event was in aid of Black Minds Matter UK, a group working throughout the UK to provide much-needed mental health support to Black people. All Iyengar teachers were asked to run a class or donate proceeds from one of their regular classes during the week beginning 28 June.

If you are interested in supporting the work of IYiA in any way, please contact: wendymcguire32@hotmail.com

Teachers' Beginnings

Keiko Onishi

I first went to yoga at City Lit (an adult education college) in Holborn, London, in 1979. I knew nothing about yoga, but tuned in comfortably to this, my first yoga class. It was taught by a mature teacher – in age and in yoga experience – called Ailsa Herremans. From then on, I attended her weekly class. At some point I learnt that it was 'Iyengar Yoga'. Ailsa introduced me to yoga retreats in Wales, where I had my first experience of Ujjayi Pranayama with Jalandhara Bandha (chinlock). The sensation of this is vivid in my body and mind to this day.



Kristyan Robinson

Shortly after I moved to London from Canada, in 1989, my landlady invited me to an Iyengar Yoga class taught by her friend, Shiv Sharma. Shiv and his wife Pam were both teachers and travelled to Pune every year to learn from the Iyengars. We would go to their home and push the furniture to the walls to make space for the class of four. I loved it.



Jackie McCaul

The year was 1994 when a friend read about an exciting new building, home to a yoga centre, which had just opened near me. We decided to go and look for it. We picked a beginners' class at random and eventually found the beautiful new building, having walked up and down Randolph Avenue a couple of times. When we entered, the room was so full we both scrambled to the back to find free spots. The teacher, Bertha Shakinovsky, put us through our paces with skill, humour and care. We left sore but invigorated, the words "grip the knees" still ringing in our ears. I still cannot believe my luck to have wandered into IYMV by chance. It changed my life.



Judy Waldman

A close friend had trained to become a teacher at Maida Vale and, in 1992, after healing a back injury in her class, I quickly became immersed in this rich practice. It introduced me to previously undiscovered corners of my body and mind. For many years I was employed as an Art Psychotherapist in the NHS for adult mental health. I became fascinated by how our emotions, conscious or otherwise, are not only expressed in our bodies, but could also be transformed by the practice of Iyengar Yoga.



Hugh Saffery Obituary

By Tim Greenhous

Hugh Saffery was a loyal student of the 'Iyengar Yoga Institute'. He was 84 years old when he died on April 3, 2020.

Yoga came late to Hugh. For many years he lived in California and worked for American Airlines. In his late forties, he developed an interest in off-road motorbiking and sustained severe ankle injuries, which left him with imperfect mobility. He took early retirement and returned to England to look after his ailing mother. Surgeons told him that he had little chance of improving his mobility but it was then recommended to him that he should attend Genie Hammond's and Mira Mehta's classes (both founding members of the 'Iyengar Yoga Institute'). His condition improved so much that he was able to go on long walks and journey to numerous countries around the world.

I first met Hugh at one of Genie Hammond's Yoga Days at Hither Green (c. 1989) and we soon became friendly, even more so when we discovered we had both been at schools in the Oxford area. Hugh's regular class at Maida Vale was on Thursday afternoon and, if I was there, we would often retire to a cafe afterwards – usually Louis at Swiss Cottage. He was always well-dressed when he came, wearing a jacket and tie and a hat. The perfect gentleman in every respect!

He regularly attended the Maida Vale yoga days and was always encouraging me to do the same. I remember meeting up with him after the late Mary Dunn from New York had taught a workshop at IYMV. He pulled my leg about my absence. Needless to say, I was in class with her on her next visit and was very glad that I was. Hugh also attended several of the LOYA (former Light on Yoga Association) Conventions and was at regular yoga courses with John and Ros Claxton in Norfolk and with Sasha Perryman in Wales. Here is a photograph of him wearing my topee and clowning about with my walking stick.

In class, he was a stayer and never complained about the work. He could do poses like Adho Mukha Vrksasana (full arm balance) but found Padmasana difficult – not surprising with his ankle injuries. He was not a fan of backbends but always did his best with them. He also served on the IYI committee and contributed interesting items to *Dipika*, such as crosswords with yoga clues.



Hugh Saffery during a yoga holiday with Sasha Perryman in Tintern in Wales

There was more to Hugh than yoga. After his mother died, he became an enthusiastic traveller, visiting over 90 countries in 15 years. He was a very cultured man who loved theatre and ballet, but especially opera. Another passion was golf and, one perhaps should not mention this in a yoga magazine, he could mix cocktails very well after attending a cocktail-making course at the Savoy!

About 16 years ago, Hugh had to have a hip replacement and gave up attending classes. I kept in touch with him for a few years after leaving London. He and his friend Edward came to stay with me but, in later years, I lost touch. Five years ago, Hugh's health took a turn for the worse and he had to have homecare at the end. He had always talked to me of leaving money to IYMV and I was delighted to hear that he left a bequest of £10,000. He loved yoga and what it had done for him and we loved him too.

Tim Greenhous was a long-standing student of IYMV and served on its committee from 1995-99. He was always available to give a helping hand. He now lives in Shrewsbury and is a guide for the National Trust in Shropshire.

Book Review by Korinna Pilafidis-Williams

Imagine If:

Stories of Ordinary People with Extraordinary Grit

Dr Rajvi Mehta

Benjamin Franklin once said “If you want something done, ask a busy person.” Rajvi Mehta fits this maxim perfectly. She has a PhD in reproductive biology and works in the field of IVF, as well as being a convenor of special interest groups on holistic medicine for the Indian Fertility Society. She is the editor of *Yoga Rahasya* (the main Iyengar Yoga magazine in India) and edited the book *Yoga for Sports* by BKS Iyengar. She has been a senior Iyengar Yoga teacher at the Light on Yoga Research Trust, Pune, since 1987 and teaches at Yogashraya in Mumbai. She is also the main scientist for the Light on Yoga Research Trust and an advisor to the Indian government’s Ministry of AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy). I could go on, and so it was with surprise that I saw she has also managed to write a book: *Imagine If* – an intriguing title!

The book is a collection of short accounts of the way in which yoga has affected people living with severe hardship or difficulty. We hear of someone suffering from recurring cancer, a yoga teacher who is severely visually impaired (blind) and a war veteran without legs. We learn how yoga is taught in a British prison, how Rajvi and others taught yoga to the earthquake victims of Kutch (Gujarat), in 2001, and how her sister, Arti Mehta, is teaching adults with special needs.

Through meeting these unique individuals, Rajvi Mehta comes to question her preconceived ideas and change her attitudes. Rather than pity, there is a realisation how awe-inspiring these people are; how they might ‘see’ things differently and lead us to question what is ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, ‘normal’ and ‘not normal’. A good example of this is the way in which she comes to see the prisoner who learns yoga not as an offender or criminal, but as someone who wants to improve himself physically and mentally.



It is a wonderful read and – at a time when most of us are questioning everything around us and what lies ahead – a truly uplifting one. What a great privilege to be introduced to these stories and see the enormous power of yoga. One cannot help but be moved by her honesty and soul-searching in the course of her encounters, and by how it changes her attitudes to disability. The book will surely have the same effect on its readers. Beyond that, it is testament to the power and benefits of Iyengar Yoga.

Rajvi has dedicated the book to her parents and to her guru, BKS Iyengar. His words sum up her message: “Yoga does not change the way a person sees things; it transforms the person who sees.”

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