

yoga news & views



Newsletter of SADIYA
(Sheffield and District Iyengar Yoga Association)
Issue 8 - November 2004





Editorial November 2004

As we approach the end of an eventful year for SADIYA, we once again welcome you to Yoga News and Views, our eighth edition.

The year has seen us open and close two Yoga Centres, the first at Lee Croft in the city centre and the second at The Workstation in the Cultural Industries Quarter. The vision of a dedicated Yoga Centre for SADIYA and for Sheffield based yoga practitioners generally is still strong and we will no doubt be moving to the next stage in this journey early in 2005. We have a short article about classes at The Workstation which, although short-lived, were most enjoyable.

To finish the year in a celebratory manner, a small contingent of students (including this editor) will be going to Pune to attend Geeta Iyengar's special course, which is to celebrate her 60th birthday in December. The course offers an opportunity that is rare for non-teachers, and all of the Sheffield participants approach this with a mixture of emotions. Jo Holliday has shared how she feels about the trip in this issue, and in the next issue we will no doubt report back on our experiences.

We now conclude our series of articles on the Eight Limbs of Yoga. Our final article is contributed by Dominic Batten and focuses on The Inward Journey of Yoga. This aspect of yoga is rarely made explicit in class but for many people provides the main attraction. The opportunity to focus inward and take a break from the relentless hustle and bustle of life in the 21st century is what, I'm sure, brings us back to our mats and classes time and time again.

You can also read a report from Bridget Strong about her trip to Reading for the 2004 Iyengar Yoga Convention. It sounds like this was a wonderful experience, with excellent planned and unplanned entertainment as well as superb yoga.

Looking ahead to next year, ten yoga practitioners will be embarking on a major step forward in their yoga experience. I am referring to the teacher training that Marion and Frances will be running in

Sheffield. Here we report on some of the future students' feelings of anticipation. And of course we wish them all the very best of luck as they set out on this challenging and immensely rewarding journey.

We currently have two vacancies at SADIYA. One is for Company Secretary and the other for someone to organise Yoga Days for the coming year. Yoga generates tremendous energy in us all and I wonder if some of you may be able to contribute some of that energy to help us keep SADIYA going as the vibrant, effective organisation it is!

You may notice that this issue is rather slimmer than previous ones, with fewer articles and pictures. Hopefully this will not detract from your enjoyment of the articles. It is due mainly to pressure of work for the two editors, and in fact Helen Clay is taking a break for this issue but we hope to welcome her back for the next issue in May 2005. We can assure our readers that normal service will be resumed as soon as possible!

As always, we would love to hear from you, our readers, with your feedback, news, views, questions and comments!

**Namaste
Wendy**

Editors

Helen Clay
280 Dobbin Hill,
Sheffield
S11 7JG
Tel 0114 2661237
Helen.Clay@ofsted.gov.uk

Wendy Weller-Davies
157 Knowle Lane,
Sheffield
S11 9SN
Tel 0114 2363039
wendy@wellerdavies.co.uk



Notice of 2004 SADIYA AGM

You are invited to the Annual General Meeting of SADIYA on Saturday 8th January 05 at 7pm at the Crookesmoor Centre, Crookesmoor Road.

Immediately following the AGM we are going to have a short social event where you can get to know the committee members and yoga practitioners from other Sheffield classes. Students and teachers who have just returned from the yoga course and birthday celebrations for Geeta Iyengar in Pune will be there with their recollections and to answer questions about this exciting event. This will be a Bring and Share, so please come along with something tasty to eat! Looking forward to seeing you there.

AGENDA

- 1) Welcome and introductions
- 2) Apologies
- 3) Minutes of the last AGM
12th October 2003
- 4) Matters arising
- 5) SADIYA annual report
- 6) Report from the Membership
Secretary
- 7) Treasurer's report and accounts
- 8) Election of officers and committee
- 9) Any other business



Yoga Centre at The Workstation

A Personal View

It could have been bigger, it could have been quieter, but for one practitioner this venue was a most agreeable place to learn yoga. The Yoga Centre at The Workstation (just off Paternoster Row in the Cultural Industries Quarter in Sheffield) lasted just six months before a permanent full-rent paying tenant was found and we had to move on yet again.

So what made it such a great place to learn yoga? The practicalities of having all equipment available and the convenient location undoubtedly contributed immensely to the popularity of this room in The Workstation building. But the real difference was the way everything was purposely organised for yoga classes. As you entered you found in front of you a place to leave your shoes, and handy hooks and sofa provided convenient places for coats and bags.

Equipment was available for all and we were rarely short of any vital prop. The opportunity to practise with ropes and a bench for back bending was a novel and enlightening experience for many. This will be sorely missed until we have settled into a new venue.

And everywhere in the room were reminders of yoga and India: pictures of Mr Iyengar, Indian wall hangings, books on yoga, incense and posters. These features along with our own yogic powers of concentration allowed us to filter out the voices and clatter of people passing in the lane outside, although occasionally the sound of "Hey, they're doing yoga in there!" did manage to wend its way into my consciousness.



Despite any minor disadvantages, we have seen what a joy a dedicated venue can bring. I'm sure I am not alone in extending heartfelt gratitude to Frances Homewood for finding this venue and enabling us to have such a wonderful place to learn. And I am sure we will all offer our support as Frances embarks on her next ambitious project.

Wendy Weller-Davies



THE INWARD JOURNEY OF YOGA

PRATYAHARA, DHARANA, DHYANA, SAMADHI

Previous articles in this series, outlining the philosophical basis of Yoga, have described the first four limbs of Patanjali's yoga - *Yama*, *Niyama*, *Asana* and *Pranayama*. Using the analogy of a tree, these have been characterised as the roots, the trunk, the branches and the leaves.

We now move on to the more subtle manifestations of yoga; continuing the tree analogy (as explored in BKS Iyengar's *The Tree of Yoga*), these describe the bark (*Pratyahara*), the sap (*Dharana*), the flowers (*Dhyana*) and the fruit (*Samadhi*) of the tree. You are less likely to be familiar with these aspects from classes or even articles on Yoga. These limbs of Yoga have to be experienced rather than taught, as they represent the level of practice where Yoga becomes inward-looking, beyond the level of description. To use terms which may be familiar from popular psychology, the awareness becomes increasingly drawn to being more fully in the present moment and focussed on the true self, to the point where the ego is totally quietened.

It would however not be true to think that we don't bother learning or teaching these aspects of Yoga, even if they are not frequently made explicit. Although Mr Iyengar's teaching is seen as very physical, his practice, speeches and writings have consistently made it clear that all aspects of Yoga can be reached through diligent practice of *Asana* and *Pranayama*. Hatha Yoga does not stand apart from more contemplative forms of Yoga; rather, it reaches towards them.

The fifth limb of Yoga, *Pratyahara*, is usually translated as 'withdrawal of the senses'. We are most likely to experience this towards the end of a *Pranayama* practice, the bit just before we start snoring, although it may suffuse into our practice in other ways. Have you noticed how a teacher, leading us into *Savasana*, will guide us through a relaxation of the body and then instruct us to attend to the sensory organs? The tongue relaxes in the mouth, there is a softening

around the nostrils, the eyes are drawn downwards and inwards, our attention is brought from the surface of the skin to the core of the body, and even the hearing shifts as we receive the instruction of the teacher from an inner attention rather than by actively listening. We are not told 'We will now do *Pratyahara*', we simply move towards it in our practice.

Consider the distractions we may experience during a yoga class. Do you sometimes find yourself thinking about what to have for tea, or are you perhaps paying rather more attention to someone else's body rather than your own? Do your teacher's words trigger a different chain of thought, or is there a song echoing around your head? Such distractions provide an illustration of how we tend to follow our senses, diverting the mind from its focus on *asana*.

In his discussion of *Pratyahara* in *The Tree of Yoga*, Mr Iyengar describes the functioning of memory. This is at first puzzling, as one would assume memory to be a function of the mind rather than the senses. He explains that memory causes us to behave impulsively, rather than intelligently; we are conditioned by previous sensory experience. Sigmund Freud has written about this in some depth, and recent scientific research confirms the power of senses such as smell in influencing our behaviour. To prevent this discussion getting too abstract, I will give two illustrations. One is the eating of a cake. If you pay attention to the actual experience of the amount of pleasure or nourishment cake-eating gives you, as opposed to how much you feel compelled to eat, you will eat less. A more yogic example is in considering your least favourite *Asana*. In your approach to this *asana*, are you recalling previous experiences of injury, failure or embarrassment, thereby experiencing the pose under the influence of the past rather than the present? It was a revelation to me during my teacher training, when we were asked which is our favourite *asana*. In being attentive to my practice, I realised I actually found all the *asanas* equally unpleasant, and the notion of a favourite or least favourite *asana* is in fact an illusion!



THE INWARD JOURNEY OF YOGA Cont'd

Freed from the influence of memory on *asana* practice (by this I do not mean forgetting the name of the pose) one approaches *Dharana*, or single-pointed attention. When the senses have been quietened, the mind is freed to be attentive to the present moment. The technique of focussing the attention on a particular point is often used in Iyengar yoga teaching, and hopefully most people reading this will at some stage have had the experience of finding the quality of *asana* transformed by fully concentrating on one small area (usually, it seems, the groins!). Bearing in mind that the sap brings nourishment to each part of the tree, we can understand that these moments of illumination through attention need to spread to the whole body. *Tadasana* illustrates the degree to which we fail to bring attention to *asana*; how often do you find you focus on one area only to forget another, and by closing the eyes you become aware of just how many fluctuations there are in the quality of attention we give to the pose?

You have no doubt, at some point, experienced some glimmer of illumination during your practice. I imagine that moment of illumination lasting throughout the holding an *asana*; then *Dharana* would have become *Dhyana*, or meditation - the flower of yoga practice. Teaching in class is usually no more than a pointer towards what can be aimed at in Yoga; for instance, when we sit at the start of a class and chant 'aum' we are not meditating, but adopting a physical and mental attitude which points towards the possibility of meditation. Meditation is not a matter of emptying oneself, which can lead one to a lonely place, but of becoming fully mindful. As Mr Iyengar points out, the mind is not located simply in the brain, but reaches every part of the body. Meditation is not separate from *asana*, but is what *asana* (any *asana*) can become when attention allows the intelligence to bloom. It cannot be taught as it comes from within. Geeta explains that in a state of meditation 'the body, the breath, the intellect, and the ego, all lose their individual existence and merge into one single state of Being.' Birjoo Mehta illustrated how the ego is stilled in attentive *asana* when after prolonged teaching of *Tadasana*, he asked the question 'What is your name?' and it proved surprisingly hard to remember the answer.

'Experience is real; words are not real' (Tree of

Yoga). In attempting to find words to describe the fruit of Yoga practice, *Samadhi*, the eighth limb, I cannot help being aware of Wittgenstein's dictum 'of that which we do not know, we should remain silent'. I am not an authority on the state of union with God (one definition of *Samadhi*). *Dhyana* evolves into total absorption of the individual into universal consciousness, so that one loses all sense of the individual self. Many of us will have some notion of the 'soul' but be unable to define or describe it for lack of experience - the words will be someone else's. Notwithstanding this, in one survey 60% of people said that at some point in their lives they had experienced a state of unexpected bliss, usually interpreted as a religious experience. Perhaps this is a *Samadhi* moment?

Literally, *Samadhi* means 'above virtue', it is a state of absolute purity. If we aim at *Samadhi* in our practice, a paradox comes into play. Our practice can be spiritual or sensual. If we want a spiritual practice we aim at a state of unalloyed emancipated bliss - yet if we long for this our state of mind is of desire, and thereby made impure. The goal, as described by Patanjali, is reached through total absorption in profound meditation. It is beyond desire.

Patanjali has shown how each limb of Yoga leads into another. It is this evolution of Yoga practice that makes it so dynamic - each aspect of Yoga is rooted in a previous aspect, and points towards future possibilities. We don't just think this, we experience it. It takes a few years to learn the physical actions of *Trikonasana*, but the pose does not end with our physical mastering of it. Our learning of Yoga starts off being evolutionary; we learn to do the pose from the outside in - from the teacher's words, we train the actions of the skin, the muscles, the bones. There is then a stage of involution, when we start to experience the pose from the inside and discover a sense of transformation. This makes the pose feel ever new, surprising and revealing. First we teach the body to do *asana*, then the *asana* teaches our body to discover Yoga. Every limb of yoga is interlinked and can be accessed through practice if we remain diligent, and it is this which makes it a mistake to think of Yoga as being purely physical.

Dominic Batten



Reading Yoga

The Iyengar Yoga Association convention this year was hosted by ORIYI, the institute based in Oxford, but the convention was held at Reading University on the last weekend in August.

It was a fantastic weekend and a rejuvenating way to end the summer holidays. The teachers this year were all based in the UK, a change from the tradition of inviting an international teacher to headline the convention. I think some people may have had their doubts about this but it worked really well in practice and demonstrated how many excellent teachers we have on our global doorstep. The teachers worked in pairs - Judy Sweeting and Tig Whattler who are based in Cirencester, Gordon and Margaret Austin from Sunderland and Lilian Briggs and her daughter Sheila Haswell, Bradford and High Wycombe respectively. One teacher concentrated on teaching whilst the other was free to walk round the class to help where necessary. It meant that despite the large classes everyone got a great deal of individual attention and I felt they soon got the measure of me and were able to help in quite subtle but effective ways in a way that 1 teacher probably would not find possible. Lilian and Sheila made a wonderful double act with Lilian's anecdotes and Sheila's thoroughness - they obviously enjoy working together and a 3-hour class seemed to fly by. Gordon and Margaret have such lovely Geordie accents which gently coax you into working far more deeply in postures than I thought possible!

We were divided into 3 groups of around 45 and rotated round the teachers so each group had each pair of teachers twice. There was an introductory class on Friday tea time which served to get the muscles stretched and body opening. It was after this class that I began to regret letting my practice slip over the summer and wondered whether I would make it over the week end! However, I felt fine on Saturday and surprised myself in getting up for pranyama before breakfast at 7am. The classes were themed - Saturday morning standing postures, Saturday afternoon forward bends and Sunday

morning backbends with all classes including some inversions. This enabled the teachers to work through a range of preparatory postures in each class. The backbend class started with adho mukha svanasana Vrksasana and Caturanga Dandasana to get the shoulders and upper back working and some gentle twists to loosen up the spine. We then progressed through a range of baby backbends, as Lilian called them; salabhasana 1, bhujangasana and then onto dhanurasana and ustrasana before ending with the big one - urdhva dhanurasana. I always attempt backbends with some trepidation as I have problems with my lower back, but after this class my back felt great - soft and relaxed.

The après yoga entertainment was excellent. On Saturday afternoon there was a display - a group of women led by Judy Sweeting did a display called the opening of the Lotus flower ending with a fine demonstration of Hanumanasana (the splits)! A group of men then demonstrated the wrist balancing postures with astounding grace and ease. These are the postures I have seen in the books but always thought must be physically impossible to achieve! On Saturday evening there was yoga pantomime, put on by people based in High Wycombe. It was very funny culminating with the villain challenging the principle boy to a yoga show down. Needless to say brute force and brawn was overcome by humility and wisdom (plus the principle boy's ability to accomplish Hanumanasana - the splits again) and the villain resolved to relinquish his evil ways and dedicate his life to practising yoga instead!

An interesting diversion to the convention was observing the group sharing the facilities with us. They were called TOGs and after much speculation about who they were it transpired they were Terry's Old Geysers - Terry Wogan's appreciation society. They observed us with the same sense of bemusement that we observed them!

So altogether a fantastic weekend - wonderful yoga, great food and accommodation, good company, good weather and a real boost to my commitment to and practice of yoga.

Bridget Strong



A Passage to India



The announcement to go to India for Geeta Iyengar's 60th birthday celebrations came in one of the Monday classes in June. I filed it away in my mind, thinking, "could I, should I?"

Almost simultaneously came the announcement of an opportunity to train as an Iyengar yoga teacher here in Sheffield. Again I filed this away thinking "could I, should I?"

Nearly two months went by and I found myself listening increasingly to a little voice saying "go on, train to be a yoga teacher!" But I thought, surely I am not good enough/experienced enough and I know I probably do not do enough practice! But then I realised I did want to take my yoga practice to another level and could do this by committing to train to be a yoga teacher. I then found myself thinking about going to India. Again I had some hesitations: would it be too much, too hard, too intense?

These anxieties were swept aside when I spoke to Frances, my teacher and found out that five others would be going from Sheffield including two teacher trainees. Suddenly this felt like the right thing to do. I made a few mad phone calls to ensure I could cover my childcare arrangements for two weeks and booked a flight!

Going to India is another stage in my journey in yoga. A journey which began at the age of 17 when I joined my mother in her local classes. Yoga is one of the threads I have pulled through with me which is now interwoven into my life.

I feel very excited and privileged to be able to experience teaching firsthand from one of the Iyengar family. I do not know yet the impact this will have on my life but my sense is that it will be profound.

Jo Holliday



Teacher training comes to Sheffield

After much pressure from would-be students, Frances Homewood and Marion Kilburn have finally agreed to run a teacher training course in Sheffield, to start in the spring of 2005. Here we present some thoughts from a few of the ten yoga practitioners who will be embarking on the course.

Helping me focus



Practising Iyengar yoga feels like a journey on which I am still near the beginning. I am hoping that the teacher training will help me move into a new phase on that journey. I am also looking forward to

getting to know the fellow travellers on that journey better. It feels a very supportive and positive group of us and working with Marion and Frances will be a real privilege.

I know that yoga is good for me but all too often find that my focus is drawn aside towards one of the other many demands on my time and consciousness. I hope the teacher training will help me clear more space in life to practice and develop.

Still not sure



I had decided not to do the course - I thought it would bring too much pressure with all the other things in my life. But I am wondering if I have made the right decision when I think of the longer-term benefits. It was

such a surprise to see it as even a possibility that I am still in the thinking about it stage - maybe doing the training would in fact be part of that exploration... just one stage on a possibly longer journey. I am also recently aware that where I work they receive lots of

requests for Yoga teachers whom they are struggling to find - never mind from Iyengar teachers - and of all the benefits the experience of Iyengar Yoga can bringas long as I never have to teach an advanced class!

A distant idea coming closer



I first looked into training to be a yoga teacher about 3 years ago, but to be honest it always seemed like a very distant idea. I am actually very glad that it took time for training to be available in Sheffield, as I

am only just beginning to feel that I have the experience and confidence to give it a go.

I have really been enjoying being an 'assistant' in Frances' beginners class - the practice of standing in front of 30 people and trying to hold my Ardha Chandrasana will, I think, be invaluable for training. And seeing the responses of a class of less experienced yogis is also very helpful.

As for actually being a teacher one day - I am still not certain. I can only take such a radical change one step at a time, so I am just happy to be doing the training. I am very grateful to Frances and Marion for taking up the challenge of training teachers in Sheffield. I hope that we all benefit from the experience, whatever the outcome.



Teacher training comes to Sheffield Cont'd

A journey I am ready for



I decided to take up the Iyengar yoga teacher training for two equally important reasons.

I have been going to yoga classes for about 12 years and started doing my own

home practice about four years ago. I usually practise the poses I like doing and certainly have not gone out of my way to do the ones I find most difficult! Plus I did not practice consistently. I wanted to feel motivated to do a daily practice and to extend my practise to include the poses I found difficult. I decided that I needed an external discipline and focus to help me to do this and the teacher training seemed like just the thing, especially as it was taking place in Sheffield. Although I haven't started the training yet, the thought of it has spurred me on to practice a few difficult poses and I can see some progress already!

Yoga has made such a difference to my life I love the idea of being able to share the benefits with others. The teacher training will give me a qualification I will feel proud of and the confidence to know I am teaching students properly. Although it seems a long way off, I am looking forward to the day when I can run classes in the local school, community hall or even our own Yoga Centre!

The training feels like a journey that I am ready to take. I expect I will feel challenged and frustrated at times - will I ever be able to do Urdhva Dhanurasana with straight arms or even get halfway with the name and the pose escape me!!

I feel very lucky to be able to do this training in Sheffield with Marion and Frances who I know will inspire and support me through this journey. I also really appreciate that I will be starting the training with a group of people I

know or at least have seen at the classes over the years. This feels very supportive and exciting!

Apprehension and excitement



My thoughts even now as I contemplate this undertaking:

- How will I fit in all the study and practice?

- What will I have to give up from my already busy schedule?
- Will I be able to remember the names of the poses?
- Will I be able to meet the high standards expected?
- Will I be able to live my life by yogic principles, and how strictly do I need to do that, to be a teacher?

Despite these concerns, I am well aware that the discipline of a formal learning programme always accelerates learning for me. And with greater knowledge and capability in yoga will undoubtedly come greater rewards.

Opportunities like this come along rarely in life and this one is too good to miss. I just KNOW this is the right thing to do!



Dates for your diary

Yoga days in Sheffield

At present we have just one event scheduled in Sheffield, but we are planning to bring you more yoga days, which will be organised early in 2005.

Wed/Thurs 29/30th December - New Year intensive with Frances Homewood. 10am - 3.30pm. £40 for 2 days / £25 single day. Places limited. Bring food to share.

For details, tel 0114 2335753
or email franceshomewood@hotmail.com

Yoga classes in Sheffield

If you wish to join a class please call the teacher first to confirm a place is available.

Frances Homewood at Fitness Club, Surrey Street

Tuesday 6.00 to 7.30 Beginners
Wednesday 9.30am to 11.00 Women

At St Mary's Parish Hall, South Road, Walkley

Monday 7.45 to 9.15 Intermediate

Call Frances on 0114 2335753 for more information

Helen Clay at St Mary's Church/Community Centre, Bramall Lane.

Wednesday 6.30 to 7.30 Beginners
Wednesday 7.45 to 9.15 Class for those with some experience and who wish to move on with their practice

Call Helen on 0114 2661237 for more information

Marios Argiros at St Mary's Church/Community Centre, Bramall Lane

Monday 6.15 to 7.45 All levels

Call Marios on 01663 751269

Paul Barkworth at Bolsterstone Village Hall

Tuesday 7.15 to 8.45 Beginners

Call Paul on 0114 2886666 for more information

Dominic Batten at The Institute, Hartley Street, Heeley

Tuesday 6.30 to 7.30pm Beginners
Tuesday 7.45 to 9.15 More experienced
Call Dominic on 0114 2649418 for more information

Padmavasini at the Buddhist Centre, Howard Road, Crookes/Walkley

Tuesday 1 to 2 Beginners (drop-in)
Thursday 1 to 2 Some experience (drop-in)
Tuesday 6 to 7 Beginners
Wednesday 6 to 7 Beginners
Thursday 6.30 to 8 Some experience

Call Padmavasini on 0114 2730335 for more information or

The Buddhist Centre on 0114 2349994 to book onto a class



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