

## The Demo

One of the basic tenets of Socratic/Platonic philosophy is that "all learning is recollection." We really already know, well pretty much everything, because of our soul's affinity with the good. We just have forgotten what we know, due to becoming embodied. Learning is really "just" a matter of waking up to the truth within. This is one of the reasons that Socrates employs the question and answer mode of teaching. He is drawing the knowledge out of the student, making the student see the implications of what he or she already knows. As a philosophy teacher, I follow this Socratic mode of teaching in my classes. I tend not to give out the answer. I structure classes in such a way that answers emerge for students in the course of discussion.

Interestingly enough, I often think of Iyengar yoga as not particularly Socratic. As an Iyengar teacher, I am trained to say DO THIS, DO THIS TO DO THAT, DO IT THIS WAY HERE, and NOTICE THE EFFECT THERE. Implicit in these instructions is the view that there are correct and incorrect actions. Obviously, there is more than one correct way to do any pose. It depends on the effect that you want to cultivate. But once you know what you want to achieve there is a tried and true way to go about using the poses to get that effect. It is not like anything goes. Iyengar teachers don't say, do whatever feels right to you. As a philosophy teacher, I almost never say anything so commanding. However, that particular sheath of Iyengar yoga instruction obscures the much deeper sense in which Iyengar yoga cultivates the practice of self-study, discrimination and discernment, the on-going practice of seeing the truth that is already there in each of us.

My yoga friend, Pam, asked a really great question about how the demo related to the use of the Socratic method. Interestingly enough, Socrates frequently made use of the Demo... perhaps the most famous example is the slave boy episode of the Meno. The basic question under investigation in the Meno is "can virtue be taught?" Meno, whose name means I'll wait, i.e. I'll wait for the answer to be given to me...) starts a conversation with Socrates by asking him this very question: can virtue be taught? What he means by this is virtue a craft or a skill that you can teach me if I pay you enough money? Socrates' own view of virtue is something rather different...and so in typical Socratic mode he engages Meno in conversation about Meno's own views of the matter... they reach an impasse. In yoga class terms, an impasse is where the teacher recognizes a demo is needed. Like no one actually was at 90 degrees in Vira II or all shoulders were caving toward the floor in chaturanga... or it is an unfamiliar pose. My sister's teacher, John Friend, says the purpose of a demo is to sear the image of the pose into the retinas of the students.

And in walks one of Meno's slaves (Slaves abounded in the Greek world.) Socrates proceeds to demonstrate that the slave has innate knowledge of the Pythagorean theorem. There are some logical problems with the demo but Socrates' point is that we really already know the truth. We just have to be lead to seeing that truth that we do already know.

In the Iyengar world, we typically pick a student to demo where whatever it is that needs to be corrected is clearly visible. Iyengar Yoga teachers will often pick two students to observe and then ask students to observe the contrast between them, that contrast brings the correct action to light. Anyway, the demo works because the students like the slave, recognize the truth that they already know but could not fully see or experience.

And that's deeply Socratic. We already know the truth. We just have to wake up to it. Our yoga practice reminds us of this all the time.