

IYASCUS NEWS

Iyengar Yoga Association of the South Central United States

May, 2010

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On Practice

“As a single footstep will not make a path on the earth, so a single thought will not make a pathway in the mind. To make a deep physical path, we walk again and again. To make a deep mental path, we must think over and over the kind of thoughts we wish to dominate our lives.”

-Henry David Thoreau

News from our Board

New Board Elections Coming Up in Winter 2010

Time flies, and new elections for the board of our South Central Region will need to be held this coming December. We are now soliciting the names of suitable nominees for this next election. According to our IYASCUS Bylaws:

- The board of directors shall consist of 7 members.
- All members of the board of directors shall have completed at least two years of study of Iyengar Yoga with an Iyengar Certified Teacher. At least three members shall hold an Iyengar Teaching Certification.
- The term of office for each member of the board of directors is two years. Each member shall be eligible for re-election to one additional two-year term. After a two-year absence from the board, former members shall again be eligible for election.

From this we see that most, if not all, of our membership are eligible for a position on our board. We are looking for people not only with experience of Iyengar Yoga and an interest in serving, but also with useful skills to help us function as an organization: web and blogging, business and management, writing and editing skills would come in handy in this organization.

You may even consider nominating yourself, if you fit the criteria.

Regional Representation on the National IYNAUS Board: The New Regional Forum

There has been movement within our National Board to follow more closely the guidelines set out in the revised 2009 [Pune Constitution](#), which is a document that Guruji Iyengar has devised to help all the Iyengar Associations worldwide to conform to each other in structure and function, according to his wishes. Please find and read the copy of this document on our [IYNAUS website](#). For the most part, our national and regional structures fit these requirements, with a few differences.

What this currently means for us in the United States is this: presently, we have a National Board (the Pune Constitution calls it an Executive Council), responsible directly to Guruji Iyengar, and because we are a large country with many members, we also have several Regional Boards reporting back to the Executive Council. The Pune Constitution has established a new structure designed to allow more balanced representation of membership in all regions. We now have a Regional Forum in addition to the Regional Boards that represent each region. Representation in the Regional Forum is proportionate to the number of members in each region, with one representative for our relatively small (less than 300 members) IYASCUS region.

Our current Regional Board has selected Anne Marie Bowery, otherwise known as our Philosophy Chair, to serve as our Regional Forum representative, and will represent us and express our ideas and concerns at national meetings in the future. We welcome her to this newest position, and look forward to better communications with our national board and through them, with Guruji Iyengar.

Membership

This is old news, but well worth repeating, because it appears that a very few of our active teachers in this region have not renewed their membership for the new year. For teachers membership is required to maintain teaching status, and for everyone else, it is not required, but it is a lovely, helpful show of support for our active community.

Signing up or renewing your IYNAUS membership is now a breeze via the online process available on the [IYNAUS website](#). We encourage both students and teachers in the South Central region to pay your membership dues online, directly through the (national) IYNAUS website

(<http://www.iyanaus.org>), indicating your regional association here in the [South Central U.S. with IYASCUS](#).

Membership benefits include but are not limited to regional newsletter, access to our lending library, discounts to IYASCUS members, scholarships, nationwide information regarding yoga events, products, services and bulletins, access to key sources of information such as the "Find a Teacher" section of the IYNAUS website, the Yoga Samachar national newsletter, and specific data relating to IYNAUS, IYASCUS and RIMYI (the Iyengar Institute in Pune, India) events.

Annual Financial Report: IYASCUS Income and Expenses, 2009

Bank Balance in January 2009	\$5,427.00
2009 INCOME	
Membership Income 2009	\$3,100.00
Total 2009 Income	\$3,100.00
2009 EXPENSES	
Web Hosting	\$166.80
Filing Fees for Non-Profit Status	\$325.00
Membership fees to IYNAUS	\$760.00
Scholarship award	\$300.00
Advertisement	\$276.94
Royalty Fee to RIMYI	\$100.00
Total 2009 Expenses	\$1,928.74
NET 2009 INCOME	\$1,171.26
Current IYASCUS Bank Balance	\$6,598.56

John Schumacher on Two Types of Practice

* This interview was recorded on Nov. 14, 2009 during the midday break of a workshop in Dallas. The editor assumes all responsibility for errors of transcription and editing that may have occurred. The trimming of John's original statements is minor, whereas the editor worked hard to reduce the wordiness of her own sometimes meandering post-lunch questions.

Two Ways of Learning in Iyengar Yoga

Devon Dederich (DD): Iyengar Yoga presents on the one hand a clear method of practice, with particular instructions and rules. Students are encouraged to take the teacher's or the Guru's, instructions and practice them faithfully and repeatedly, and observe how they work on their bodies and minds.

Another very different notion in Iyengar Yoga is something that Gururji has said repeatedly in his life and practice and teaching, is, "You have to find out," which suggests that the student become his or her own problem-solver, her own teacher.

The question is, what is the real relationship between these two ways of practicing? How much license does that "You find out" instruction give me, as a practitioner, to experiment with the teaching I receive in class?

John Schumacher(JS): It's an interesting question. What occurs to me initially is that it's not an either-or situation. It is really a question of timing and maturity in the practitioner.

The beginning student has very little information. So the information received from the teacher is what guides him or her in practice. The basic approach is, if you will, to "follow the rules", taking the instruction and adhering to it fairly religiously, as the way to practice in the beginning. The question arises with respect to them finding their own way.

By what tools, what means, would somebody on that level find their own way? They don't have the discrimination, the perception, the experience, the skill to experiment systematically and in an effective way. So for the beginning students, I think it's pretty important to follow the instructions that your teachers have given you, to guide you in developing the maturity and discriminating wisdom to see what is really going on, to feel not only the immediate local effects, but the farther-ranging secondary and tertiary effects of what you're doing.

As you practice over a period of time you begin to understand that process of what causes this, and what's the root of that, and you begin to perceive how these instructions work for you in your own practice.

Once you have started to develop that discriminating wisdom, then you have some of the tools to be able to explore on your own, and say to yourself, "Well the teacher said 'Do this, turn this that way.' What if I turn it the other way? What happens?" If you're a raw beginner, you will have an immediate experience that "This is different in this way," but you don't get the far-ranging effects, the relationship between this and other movements, or the breath, or the mind; you just don't have the skill and wisdom to do that. But as a mature practitioner, you do. You can begin to study what the effects are for you, and because every body is unique, every energy level is different, mental processes are different, all of those effects are unique and individual on a certain level. Then you can begin to adjust your practice to expand your capabilities and fulfill your needs.

The Development of Discriminating Intelligence

An example might be that when I was younger, my practice was much more physically energetic, much stronger, much faster, and that seemed to work fine for me. I developed the ability to do lots of difficult poses; I was healthy and my body worked well. I did tend to create problems in my body more that way—not major injuries, but minor tweaks and things I would then deal with.

But as I got older, I didn't really have the stamina to practice that way. And also, even more than not having the stamina, I began to notice how it was affecting my nervous system: how I functioned during the day, how I slept, how my digestive processes worked, all those things that are related to the systemic being. I began to readjust my practice to make myself function better, physically, physiologically, and in my nervous system particularly.

DD: May I ask how?

JS: As an example, (and I wrote about this for [Yoga Samachar](#) [ed. note: Spring/Summer 2009 issue], I noticed that my blood pressure was a little high, about 135/ 85 or 90. Which is not "Oh, my God!" But it's edgy. And Western allopathic physicians say, "You should take something so that you don't damage your cardiovascular system and all the rest." So, I didn't take medications, but I adjusted my practice and I got sensitive to subtle changes in pressure in the pit of my throat, in my temples, in the corners of my eyes and particularly in my inner ears. And those were the main areas.

In my practice I didn't do *Sirsasana* for a long time, or *Sarvangasana*. I didn't do any inversions; I couldn't really even do legs-up-the-wall (supported *Urdhva prasarita padasana*). I eventually got to where I could do legs-up-the-wall if I put a pillow under my head. With my head flat on the floor I could feel the pressure; if I propped my head up a little bit, the pressure would go away, my throat would relax and the temples would soften. So that changed how I did back bends, it changed how the arm balance was. It changed lots of things. But it seemed obvious that I needed to do something to take care of that particular problem since it was a serious problem. So like that, I adjusted my practice.

DD: Now in *Light on Yoga*, we see that a primary high blood pressure pose is *Halasana*...

JS: Yes, well, I tried all those things. I tried all those sequences in “A Matter of Health,” that great big book, and none of them worked for me. Maybe I wasn’t doing them right, who knows? But they didn’t work for me. So having the yoga prescriptions not work for me, I had to find my own way. And even more than how I adjusted my asana practice was how I adjusted the pranayama practice. That’s where I really developed the sensitivity to feel those pressure changes. They say you can’t feel your blood pressure, but I think you can. And so I became very sensitive.

And another thing I found was that, they say for high blood pressure you do *Viloma II*, and for low blood pressure you do *Viloma I*. They emphasize inhalations for low blood pressure and exhalations for high blood pressure. It doesn’t work that way for me. *Ujjayi III*, for instance, didn’t work for me at that time, though it does now. If I did *Viloma I* inhalation, where I could break it up and during the pauses I could make those subtle adjustments, you know, draw the skin down the back, take the dorsal spine in, release my temples, let go of the jaw, adjust the soft palate... If you are experienced enough and you practice long enough and you experience those things, even in those brief pauses in the *Viloma* breath, then you can make it work.

So like that, I didn’t do *Antara Kumbhaka* for a long time. *Bahya Kumbhaka* worked okay, that was as per prescription, and *Nadi Sodhana* too, but just for a couple of cycles. So I had to go on adjusting my practice, and as I brought my blood pressure to a healthier and more balanced place, I could start adding things to my practice. But I’m still very conscious of that. And there are still days when I can do a strong, very active back bend practice, and there are other days where it’s pretty much a supported practice, over stools and benches and the horse. I have to go by where I am at the moment.

Mature Practice, Individualized Practice

So that’s how, as you get more experienced and mature in the practice, you start to individualize the practice to suit what will give you the most in terms of awareness, of physical wellbeing, in terms of maximum, optimal energy.

DD: not necessarily “maximum pose.”

JS: Not necessarily. I forget who made the distinction that I really like, maybe it was [Guruji’s son] Prashant, who said there is a difference between maximum and optimum. And I think it’s a really important distinction. I think there is a time to “Do the maximum!” (spoken in a deep commanding voice), and then there is a time—more time, really, for the optimum. What is the best for this moment? Sometimes it’s the maximum and sometimes it isn’t.

Two Iyengar Methods: Tidy Up Now or Tidy Up Later or Systematization and Freedom

DD: Moving this discussion of the “follow instructions” vs the “you find out” approach to the matter of teaching: Let’s take the example of *Utthita Hasta Padangusthasana* as a beginners’ pose. An orthodox Iyengar approach, so to speak, might be to stand straight in *Tadasana*, and pick up the right big toe with the hand or a belt, then recover all of *Tadasana* by straightening the standing leg, leveling and squaring the hips and shoulders, and re-extending the spine, and only then to stretch the lifted leg out straight. The student may be so tight or imbalanced that this “strict” procedure may not achieve an optimum or a maximum pose.

Another sort of approach would be to pick up the foot, and then go straight on and stretch the leg out, the idea being to approximate the basic shape of the pose, and then to proceed to refine yourself back again into that foundational, aligned “*Tadasana*” action in the hips and legs and trunk. These are two seemingly contradictory methods, which both fall within the Iyengar system.

JS: They do, they do. But I don’t think they are contradictory.

DD: And in light of this question of ours, about how one “finds out?”

JS: You find out either way. You can find out both of those ways. What I often say in teaching my own students about the differences between both of those approaches--because it’s an ongoing question—is that both ways have validity. One, if you always keep things tidy, is like a way of cooking. Some cooks, when they are cooking and they use a dish, they clean it up right then, and they keep cleaning up as they

go along, so when they're done cooking, there's the dish and the kitchen's clean, it's all done. Other people, when they're done cooking it looks like a bomb went off in there, and then they clean up at the end. Both ways can work. You can make a beautiful meal either way, both have pluses and minuses, and both depend on the cook.

[A friend of ours] cooked a delicious Indian dinner at our house one time for a benefit, and I mean, it looked like a war zone. For weeks afterward, we could find spots of curry on the wall at about knee level. I'm not sure that if she tried to clean up in between things, that she could actually fix a meal as well.

What I say to the students is that the advantage of keeping things tidy all the time is that you are less likely to make a mistake that would cause an injury or a problem, because things are staying in order and alignment. It doesn't preclude it, but it changes the likelihood. And there is a clarity and precision and systematization about working that way that makes things a little easier to catch and understand sometimes.

The drawback is that you can become so rigid and controlled in that process that the whole process loses life; the pose loses its life—

DD: The method becomes a clamp.

JS: Exactly, it becomes a clamp. You get yourself stuck and you stay within these boundaries you have set up for yourself, and you never get to move past them. You don't get to move past them in terms of the freedom of the pose, and you also don't get to move past them in terms of the vitality of the experience of doing the yoga. You're too busy making sure everything is okay. It's like a technically good musician, like a pianist, whose fingering and notes are all correct, the timing is all correct, it's all just technically perfect, but it has no vitality, has no life, has no soul. So somewhere you have to either let go the perfection, or transcend the perfection, go through the perfection, to that soulful quality.

On the other hand, if you just get into some shape of the pose, do the best you can, and start to work it from there, that has a drawback in that maybe the shape you picked is not a very healthy shape, and you're putting pressure on your sacrum, or...that you've put yourself in an unfixable position.

On the other hand, you're a little free to "be" in the pose, and you get to the general shape more quickly that way, and closer to what the final shape would be, and then you refine things from there, work things out from there.

And also what happens from that is, as you refine your actions from that pose, in a way that sometimes helps you to understand the actions of the pose better, because you have a place you're coming from and a place you're going to, and you have to be concerned with process.

The Kind of Student Affects the Method Used

DD: This supposes that you have the ability to observe.

JS: Exactly, and that brings up the question of timing. When to do which? Let's say you're a parent, and you've got two children. One child is self-confident, strong, energetic, outgoing. That one you can be a little strong with, you can sort of make them toe the line. The other one may be a little insecure, a little hesitant, not so quick. That one you might go a little slowly with, let them take the shape of the action—whether we're talking about life here or about the pose—you be supportive; let them find their way with your guidance, and they go a little more slowly. It's different approaches for different people.

If it's your own practice, you have to find out what approach is going to work for you. Maybe on some poses one approach works better; maybe on some days it works better to be more precise; maybe on other days it works better to be a little loose and play. It's hard to make a rule about that.

DD: One last question, about teaching. I hope it's not too complicated. Geeta spoke about this in France in 2002, and her talk came out as a publication, *Mobility in Stability* (2007). One thing she said there and elsewhere, is that everyone needs mobility before stability. I have heard this explained by saying that beginners need to do a lot of poses rather than holding poses for any amount of time. They need to make

a lot of different shapes, and not necessarily with a lot of accuracy. The teacher should not slow them down with matters of alignment and such. This has a bearing on what we're talking about, about the finding-out process.

How does the teacher of beginners introduce this method of alignment, which is so integral to our discipline? How do you go from getting beginners mobile by making lots of these basic, not-so-precise shapes, with enough alignment for safety, to that realm of intelligent refinement?

How does the teacher move from the beginner's basic finding-out experience to the discriminating finding-out experience?

Moving from Beginner Observation to Discriminating Observation

JS: Yes, the beginner is definitely finding out things right away. There are even in the very beginning, certain minimal alignment issues that have to be raised. If you're in *Trikonasana*, and you're bending forward and putting your hand on the floor three feet in front of your foot, you the teacher are going to change that. That's an alignment issue. There are basic alignment issues right from the beginning; otherwise their experience isn't one of the pose. That pose, anyway.

DD: So when do you start insisting, for example, that they keep their right knee turned?

JS: I do that fairly early on, because it's partly a health issue. I take those issues which are primarily related to injury, and bring them in fairly early.

DD: like first class.

JS: I wouldn't do that *first* class. I start with the feet in the first class. So we just do the four corners of the feet. That's an alignment issue, and that affects everything. If you're going to turn your thigh it affects the foot anyway, and if your foot isn't already established, then when you turn your thigh you'll twist your ankle and roll on the outside of your foot. So I start from the base and teach very basic alignment issues around the base, and then I pretty much let the rest of the pose go. I say, "Keep your shoulders in line with your hips," and that's all. Those are the key points. That's all in the beginning. And we do the pose a couple of times. We do all the poses a couple of times. In the beginning it's fairly slow because they don't know any of the shapes, and we have to stop and show them the shapes. But then the tempo picks up as they learn the shapes, and then we do lots more shapes before we start to really get a lot of fine alignment points. But there is an alignment point in each class.

DD: a persistent alignment point.

JS: Yes. And usually, the alignment point is based on body parts. So in the first class it's about the feet. And in the second class, it's still about the feet but in a more refined way. In the first class, it's just left foot, right foot. In the second class, it's the four corners of the feet. So when you come into *Trikonasana*, it's not just make your back foot press the same as your front foot, it's make the outside of the foot press the same as the inside. But that's all; I'm not talking about the shoulder blades or the sides of the neck or the sternum, or any of that stuff.

DD: And do you wait in the class, until they get that before you move to the next stage?

JS: if the whole class is completely at a loss, then I have to go back. But that's rarely the case. Being so minimal, so basic, most everybody will get it. But I'm sure you still get students at Level II, who still don't press the outer edges of their feet. Or keep the back foot on the floor. And if we're looking for perfection, even in only one aspect, we'll never get anywhere. It's an overall feeling, an observation, that they're in the ballpark with this. If they are, then we can go on and keep hammering on that first point. You know, even professional baseball players keep going out and playing pitch and catch; they catch grounders off the ground; they still do batting practice. Here they are, top players, and still doing the basics. You have to keep coming back to the basics even when you start getting into the more subtle refinements.

The Need for a Teacher

DD: Which brings us back to the point that there is this method we need to keep coming back to in our practice. We keep restoring ourselves in this basic practice and while there may be experimentation, we keep returning to the fundamentals of the practice.

JS: That's one of the real values of having a teacher. Not everyone does have a teacher, but when you go off experimenting and wandering around and finding your own way, which becomes essential at some point, you have a teacher you can go back to, that teacher can say to you, "You're on a dead-end street, man, you're not going to get anywhere with that." Or the teacher could say, "If you could just go this way a little more in your explorations," and if the teacher is wise, they can say, "You need to do this," or "If you do this, then find out what happens." Those are really two different ways of saying something to somebody. The teacher needs to be sensitive enough to know when the student needs a firm guiding hand, or when the student needs a pat on the head and think about this, and now go back on your explorations.

DD: Enough. Thank you.

JS: Thank you.

UPCOMING IYENGAR WORKSHOPS AND TRAININGS

We recognize that this is an incomplete listing of upcoming Iyengar events, and we depend on you, our affiliated studios and teachers, to **let us know what wonderful teachers are coming to your area**. Please keep us all informed in a timely fashion by [sending us an email](#) with the teacher's name, the workshop date, location and your workshop contact information (see the formatting below) and we will post it on our regional website and in this newsletter. Help us spread the word!

May 2010

Ramanand Patel and Mukesh Desai: Yoga and Sound

Date: May 7-9

Location: [Dallas Yoga Center](#)

Contact: info@dallasyogacenter.com

June 2010

Eddy Marks and Mary Obendorfer Asana Workshop and Teacher Training

Date: June 18-20

Location: [BKS Iyengar Yoga Studio of Dallas](#)

Contact: [Randy Just](#)

Laurie Blakeney Iyengar Yoga Workshop

Date: June 25-27

Location: [Clear Spring Studio](#)

Contact: [Devon Dederich](#) or [Peggy Kelley](#)

Sri H.S. Arun: Iyengar Yoga Intensive
Date: June 28-July 1
Location: [Boerne Yoga Center, Boerne, TX](#)
Contact: [Debbie Pedersen](#)

July 2010

Rebecca Lerner: Iyengar Yoga Workshop
Date: July 9-11
Location: [Houston Iyengar Yoga Studio](#)
Contact: Constance Braden at **(713) 527-9100**

August 2010

George Purvis: Iyengar Yoga Workshop
Date: August 20-22
Location: [Austin Yoga Institute](#)
Contact: [Peggy Kelley](#) or [Devon Dederich](#)

September 2010

Eddy Marks and Mary Obendorfer Asana Workshop and Teacher Training
Date: September 10-12
Location: [BKS Iyengar Yoga Studio of Dallas](#)
Contact: [Randy Just](#)

October 2010

Elise Miller Yoga Workshop
Date: October 1-3
Location: [Dallas Yoga Center](#)
Contact: info@dallasyogacenter.com

November 2010

Dean Lerner Yoga Workshop
Date: November 5-7
Location: [Austin Yoga Institute](#)
Contact: [Peggy Kelley](#) or [Devon Dederich](#)

Lois Steinberg Iyengar Yoga Workshop
Date: November 5-7
Location: [BKS Iyengar Yoga Studio of Dallas](#)
Contact: [Randy Just](#)

January 2011

Eddy Marks and Mary Obendorfer: Asana & Teacher Training
Date: January 14-16
Location: [BKS Iyengar Yoga Studio of Dallas](#)
Contact: [Randy Just](#)

Dean Lerner: Iyengar Yoga Workshop
Date: January 28-30
Location: [Houston Iyengar Yoga Studio](#)

Contact: Constance Braden at **(713) 527-9100**

March 2011

Eddy Marks and Mary Obendorfer: Asana & Teacher Training

Date: March 25-27

Location: [BKS Iyengar Yoga Studio of Dallas](#)

Contact: [Randy Just](#)

April 2011

Mary Obendorfer: Asana & Teacher Training

Date: April 8-10

Location: [Yoga Center Of Lawrence - Lawrence, KS](#)

Contact: yogacenter@sunflower.com

June 2011

Eddy Marks and Mary Obendorfer: Asana & Teacher Training

Date: June 10-12

Location: [BKS Iyengar Yoga Studio of Dallas](#)

Contact: [Randy Just](#)

September 2011

Lois Steinberg: Iyengar Yoga Workshop

Date: September 30-Oct 2

Location: [Austin Yoga Institute](#)

Contact: [Peggy Kelley](#) or [Devon Dederich](#)

CONTACT YOUR IYASCUS BOARD

To send an email to anyone on our IYASCUS Board of Directors, just click on the name of the one you want to reach:

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[Cheree Winston](#), *Vice President, Outreach Chair*

[Devon Dederich](#), *Secretary, Newsletter Chair*

[Michelle Mock](#), *Membership Chair*

[Sandra Torngren](#), *Treasurer*

[Anne Bowery](#), *Philosophy Chair, Regional Forum Liason*

[Karen Phillips](#), *Website Chair*

Please do send a note to us. Tell us how we're doing, or give us new ideas of how to do better. Send us feedback on our articles and postings, tell us about your upcoming workshops and trainings, and write us an article. Our aim is to share information and spread the word.

<http://iyascus.org>