



Welcome to the Summer 2023 edition of our e-newsletter. www.oriy.org.uk

Dear Members,

One of the reasons I enjoy preparing this newsletter is that at least three times a year I dip into my collection of yoga books searching for interesting pearls of wisdom to share about Iyengar Yoga. I don't have a massive collection but it continues to grow and it's a joy to have a reason to do some research.

This time I've revisited Rajvi H. Mehta's inspirational book 'Imagine If' and reproduced a little on how a student with a visual impairment was able to develop such a strong inner vision by practising Iyengar yoga. She stresses the importance of precision and alignment, a vital feature of Guruji's teaching.

Guruji said, *'Extension brings space, space brings freedom, freedom brings precision. Precision is truth. It is through the alignment of the body that I discovered the alignment of my mind, self and intelligence.'*

I have also produced a snippet from Light of Life by Guruji from Chapter 2 -Stability: Balance – Evenness is harmony. It helps us to begin to understand the truly amazing depth of his knowledge of how the body needs to behave to create harmony.

The Convention in Harrogate in May with Jawahar Bangera was as you'd expect outstanding, his teaching was so very thorough and inspiring – one never fails to come away with renewed appreciation of Iyengar Yoga. Ruth Denbigh has produced an excellent summary – many thanks to her for all this effort.

The next workshop is in the Autumn term with Margaret Rawlinson see more information about this event later in this newsletter.

As in previous years the 2023 Annual General Meeting (AGM) will take place on Zoom on Saturday 2nd September at 9.30am – we will be sending the agenda and login details in a separate email nearer the time but if any of you have any items of AOB you want to raise please email me.

The recipe this time is for wheaten bread. I have recently returned from visiting relations in Ireland and it was a delicious feature of many meals we shared there – easy to make and so much better than bought bread.

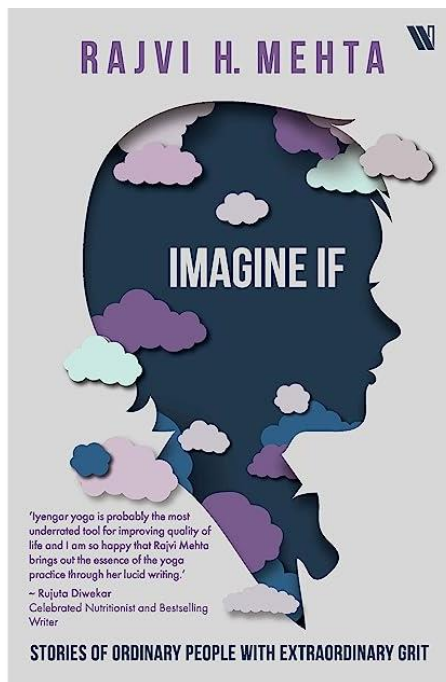
Finally, many thanks to Tanya De Leersnyder our ORIY Rep who has produced a summary of the last Exec meeting – it runs to 8 pages (from the original of 76 pages!) so it will be attached to the newsletter rather than included within it



Love and best wishes

Mary x

ORIY Chair and Newsletter Editor Maryfitzpatrick10@icloud.com



In this inspirational book Mehta recounts the stories of people with tremendous grit and determination, who have overcome huge challenges – amputated limbs, cancer, emotional trauma – with the aid of Iyengar Yoga. Guruji said, ‘Yoga does not change the way a person sees things; it transforms the person who sees.’ Jawahar Bangera is quoted as saying ‘.... straight from the heart! In this book there is a life lesson for all of us, as well as a strong case for practising Iyengar Yoga’.

Here is an extract from the chapter entitled ‘Light is Heard’. It cleverly explores the place of light and vision and how human beings can develop the sixth sense of proprioception, (also sometimes known as Kinaesthesia), our inbuilt capability to know the position and movement of our body with reference to the external environment. Take this simple test of proprioception. Close your eyes and move your index finger towards your nose. Even without a mirror, we can easily move the index finger to the tip of the nose. However,

even if we pass this basic test, our proprioception is poor. I doubt whether any of us can walk with the same speed with our eyes closed in our own homes as we do with our eyes open. Should we then call the visually impaired as people with a high sense of proprioception or a high PQ (Proprioception quotient)? The question is whether proprioception can be cultivated. After all, we can exercise our muscles and various faculties, and we tend to lose certain abilities if we don’t use them often. Take the example of memorising phone numbers. A generation earlier, people could memorise many phone numbers with ease; today, with mobile phones, we cannot recollect even five. Likewise, with a more frequent use of GPS, we may lose our sense of navigation.

A decade ago, a young German yoga practitioner, Birgit Andrews, did show that it was possible to develop this sense of proprioception. Back then I did not even know that such a term existed.

Stand erect, with your feet and toes together, and close your eyes. Within a few moments, you will feel that you are swaying. While balance is influenced by the ears, the vestibular organs, you will find that the eyes play a role too. Imagine walking with your eyes closed in a plain field, where there is no fear of banging into something or tripping over – a sense of imbalance will still exist. Imagine trying to learn a new activity like yogasana with the eyes closed. My imagination totally failed me.

If I want to learn or teach any yogasana, the eyes play a primary role. I either open a copy of Light on Yoga or watch a demonstration by a teacher. In fact, the power of the eyes over the ears becomes evident in cases where words and visuals don’t match. For example, if a teacher asks a student to extend their arms but the teachers arms are themselves bent, the student imitates the teachers bent arms. Or supposing the teacher is demonstrating Trikonasana, facing the students. If she bends to the right and verbally asks the students to move to the right, surprisingly many would move to the left, mirroring the teacher. Learning and teaching yoga both seemed nearly impossible in the absence of vision. Of course, one could instruct orally and make do with whatever the student did, thinking ‘at least, they are doing something’. This is often out of a sense of sympathy for their limitation or contentment with their effort. But Birgit Andrews was different. She was not content with just the effort. Instead, she developed and mastered proprioception to a level beyond imagination. She was born with normal vision and a love for colours. An accident at the age of twenty-two took away her vision but not her love or sensitivity. She had to learn how to see with her inner eyes, and she did.

Birgit was an active person like most young people and loved movement, whether in the form of classical dance or skiing. The accident brought an end to these activities. Using the body to even walk - a simple movement we take for granted – was challenging. It was a big effort to retain balance. Her first reaction was ‘Why me?’ The only answer is to accept the situation and move on. If we don’t life becomes a burden.

After eight years, a friend offered to take Birgit to an Iyengar Yoga class. She accepted the offer as yoga is to be done within the restricted space of a mat, which meant she could move without banging into something or falling. The practice of yoga did something far beyond what she had expected. It possibly developed an intense sense of proprioception. To understand how that happened, let us visualise a typical Iyengar Yoga class for beginners.

A class has anywhere between ten and fifty students. They are organised on their mats in such a way that the teacher who is front can see all of them. The teacher then calls the students closer and demonstrates an asana with basic instructions. Then the students return to their mats, while the teacher goes to the front of the class and repeats the asana, this time with step-wise instructions, as the students follow. Here, the students use two senses: sight and sound. The students become a reflection of the teacher and eventually progress to doing a variety of asanas.

Imagine Birgit in a similar class. She is dependant only on audio without the visual. The class starts. ‘Stand in Tadasana with your feet and toes together. Look down and make sure your feet are touching each other.’ Most students look down and find that their toes are not touching properly, although they thought they were. Closing the eyes for Tadasana also brings an unsteadiness and makes balance difficult. The body seems to sway from side to side. Imagine this state in one of the first asanas – what would happen with the others as one progressed. This was possibly Birgit’s experience.

One could be sympathetic and let Birgit stand in whatever way she could and be happy that she was at least doing something. But doing 20% of an asana does not yield a 20% effort, just like taking 20% of the prescribed dose of a medicine does not affect a 20% cure. **With the practice of asana, too, a posture will help only when it is done accurately and precisely.**

Academic scholars who interpret the ancient Indian texts on the yoga sutras often mistake the factor of comfort. The first sutra on asanas, ‘sthira sukham asanam’, literally translated means stability, joy or pleasure or comfort, posture or yogic posture. It can be interpreted as being in any comfortable and stable position. Or, it can be being comfortable and stable in any position or posture. There is a vast difference between these two statements. The former is a compromised state where we choose a comfortable position, while the latter is a state where, by making changes in our own self, we become comfortable and stable in any position. The former restricts us to our ‘comfort zone’, the latter gives us the ability to extend our boundaries and attain the same composure even beyond the comfort zone.

Birgit could have just spread her feet a bit and attained her balance in Tadasana. Did it really matter if the feet and toes were not placed together? What would a distance of 1 cm make to her body, brain and senses? In practice, that 1cm does make a world of difference within the frame of the body- while the body sways when the feet are together and the eyes are closed, extending the back of the calves and the frontal thigh muscles gives as much stability as when the eyes are open. How does it happen? Well, proprioceptive receptors are located in the muscles and tendons, and extending the muscles sends different signals to the brain to give us a state of balance. Since each asana extends different muscles, one can imagine the number of receptors that can be activated if one attempts to

get stability in a variety of asanas without compromising or getting into the state of 'at least doing something'. Thus started Birgit's journey with Tadasana.

With time, more and more asanas were introduced. As instructions came from the teacher, questions popped up in her head. For Shirshasana, when the teacher said, 'Interlock the fingers and place the forearms and palms on the mat with the elbows as wide apart as the shoulders', she wondered: 'How close are my elbows? Are they in line with the shoulders?' Fortunately, the teachers would physically adjust her elbows so that they were in line with her shoulders. This happened with all the postures.

Slowly, she started becoming independent in class and did not require much physical help from the teachers. By staying within the boundary of her mat, she also overcame her fear of banging into someone or tripping. The mat became her greatest asset. It set the boundaries and it gave orientation and the alignment that Iyengar Yoga has gained recognition for. She used it as her 'eyes'.

Little did she know that she was not just coping with her condition but developing a whole new dimension of inner attention and inner vision. She realised that while people saw their bodies from the outside, she had to feel her arms, legs and trunk from the inside and align them. This was a great struggle. While others aligned with their vision, she had to align them with the internal touch and despite all her best efforts it was very difficult. She tried hard to get that internal alignment which she felt all the other students in the class must be achieving just by following the teacher's instructions and demonstrations. Of course, this was not true – unbeknownst to her, she was progressing much better than she thought till she was in front of Guruji's eyes.

In 1993 she attended the convention at Crystal Palace, London, which was taught by Guruji himself. In the class of over a thousand people, Guruji noticed this lady who was precisely following and implementing his teachings in her asanas consistently. He called her on stage and made her perform the asana along with some senior teachers. It was soon noticed how this young German exhibited precision, which Germans are famous for, in her asanas.

She was appreciated and applauded, not because she was doing 'something' despite being blind, but because she was doing it better than those with vision. It was indeed a big boost to her confidence.

How did Birgit do it? She did it with inner vision and inner attention. Psychologists today recognise the different parts of the brain that are activated by our attention – the pre-frontal cortex for outward attention on an object and the posterior cingulate cortex in the middle region of the brain for attention directed inward. Birgit learnt subjectively. Both subjective and objective learning are important. Objectivity brings ease of expression and assessment; it is more structured but lacks sensitivity. Subjectivity generates finesse and develops clarity, balance and a discriminative intelligence. But subjective learning is always more difficult than objective learning.

It is only in the second decade of the twenty-first century that functional neuroimaging is making it possible to understand the areas of the brain involved in developing different attributes and how the senses beyond the basic five play a role in evolution. It makes me wonder how Guruji knew all this. Why did he insist on precision in yoga practice? How did he have the confidence that regular practice would transform individuals? It was simply through his own experience and his ability to develop his sixth sense so strongly that he could teach people to sense. Birgit continues with her practice and now fifteen years later she teaches a class of forty with the assistance of her brother as and when required.

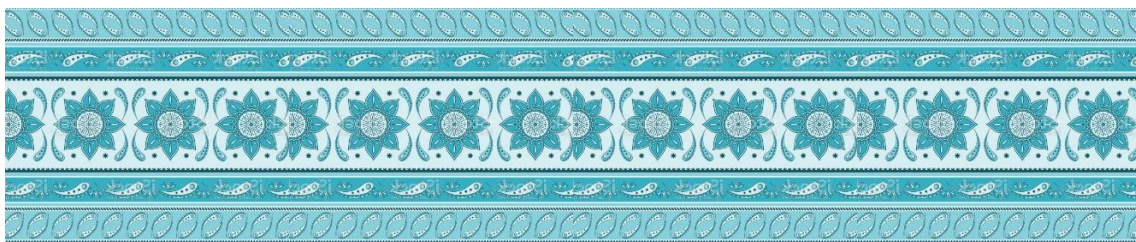
Balance: Evenness is Harmony - from Light on Life by B.K.S.Iyengar



Through yoga one can begin to develop a perfect balance between both sides of the body. All of us begin with imbalances, favouring one side or the other. When one side is more active than the other, the active side must become the guru for the inactive side to make it equally active. To the weaker side, we must apply attention. We must also show more care. We show keener interest to improve a dull and struggling friend than for an eager and intelligent one. In the same way you have to show yourself this same compassion and act on the weaker side of the body while taking pleasure in the achievement of the active side.

Precision in action comes when the challenge by one side of the body is met by an equal counter-challenge of the other. This ignites the light of knowledge. You must keep your balance by using the intelligence of the body (whether instinct, feeling or ability) but not by strength. When you keep the balance by strength, it is a physical action; when by intelligence of the body, it is relaxation in action. Evenness is harmony, and in that evenness alone you learn.

Seek balance of awareness in all positions by observing the differences on the right and left as well as the intensity of stretch from plane to plane, limb to limb, muscle to muscle, joint to joint and from bottom to top, side to side, and back to front. Create equal stretch, equal stability, equal spacing, and equal intensity of movement. To bring a part of the body in correct alignment, you have to work with the whole body. You have to work with each and every part of the body. For each asana or pranayama, you have to know what the function or state of each area and each part of the body should be, whether active or passive, stable or mobile. When performing asanas, no part of the body should be idle, no part should be neglected. If you are stretching the right leg, for example, the left leg should not be forgotten. On the contrary you have to alert the left leg to remain stable. This complementary action frees up the right leg to move with ease. Extend where the body is not moving. If you perspire on one side, you should also evenly perspire on the other. When you perspire more on one side, you have not used the other portion fully. Perspiration should be even but not excessive.





All about the Convention by Ruth Denbigh

The convention this year was a great meeting of those eager to learn from Jawahar Bangera. Jawahar taught with a humble style which included a gentle manner and style, with a complimentary spirit-lifting humor.

Every session started with the whole group joining together in the invocation to Sage Patanjali, the Adorations to the Guru, and prayer. A large group in harmony is really quite a fantastic experience. Jawahar spoke about the importance of the prayers when learning together in peace.

As many of us are acutely aware everyone is different, every body is different, every body has a different state each day. The parts of Jawahar's teaching that resonated with me over the three days are noted below with a few highlights from the three days. Any errors or omissions or misunderstandings are mine alone.

There were lots of detailed instructions for those seeking to go deeper in their practice as well as the general level for those less practiced in an asana. We were instructed to ensure even pressure is exerted on the mound of the index finger in Namaskara. Then we were encouraged to experiment, to feel the expansion of the shoulder blades away from the spine and its steadying effect.

Jawahar spoke of the "self-destruct button" we all seem to harbor, in particular in coming out of asanas. A reminder that equal care needs to be given to coming out of an asana to avoid injury as going into the asana. Especially when tired it is easy to lapse and fall out of an asana with little care or attention risking long-term problems with joints.

Each session started with a small amount of time to warm up, doing symmetrical asanas of our own choice. This was a nice way to start the class, there is something very grounding and centering about symmetrical asanas. A good way to work out where you will need to work a little harder balancing things out later in the class.

Jawahar asked us to carry out an experiment starting with our right side first in a Utthita Trikonasana type wider stride asana. He asked us to mark the length of our stride once facing to the right in Parsva Hasta Padasana. Then to face to the left, was the stride length the same? Often we choose to go the right first practicing the right side first we often neglect the left slightly in a slightly shorter stride. It was a good reminder that we can get into habits that don't benefit us and what else are we failing to notice in the asana through habit?

Within his teaching, Jawahar was keen to remind us of the many connections between the asanas and that by breaking down a more complex asana we can practice its elements in other asanas, building up to a stronger final asana. Interestingly he taught, seated Bharadvajasana I to the right followed by Utthita Trikonasana to the left, so that we might feel the twist of the abdomen required in Uttihita Trikonasa, carrying the memory forward from Bharadvajasana I. This was then followed by Bharadvjasana I to the left and then Utthita Trikonasana to the right.

There seemed to be a real encouragement to review the asanas we often avoid practicing or think we understand yet may have become stagnant in. To illustrate Jawahar taught Adho Mukha Svanasana, he encouraged us to work toward getting our heads to the floor, shoulders lifted and dorsal in, mind, intelligence, and breath working together to go deeper in the asana. A beginner is looking for the direction and the general shape they are not practiced enough to get their head on the floor. But as a student practices, they should continue moving forward using their mind, intelligence, and breath toward the goal moving forward and deeper into the asana.

Jawahar was keen that we look after our joints in particular our shoulders, knees, and hips. He spoke about keeping the connection into the joint and rotating in the correct direction was very important to the longevity of the joints. He was keen to remind us that for the health of the joints, we should not bypass them with flexibility, nor just let go when coming out of an asana.

He spoke about not locking the knees but locking the elbows to keep the connection into the shoulder joint. We practiced taking our arms above our heads keeping the connection into the shoulder joint, and taking our arms out to the sides for Utthita Hasta Padasana. Practicing variations in the movements for those with stiffer shoulders too. Once our arms were out to the sides we were encouraged to lock our elbows and rotate the elbow joint to face upward rotating into the shoulder joint, rotating the back to the front. Finally maintaining the rotation into the shoulder joint and in turn, the elbow joint, carefully turning at the wrist so that the palms face down. The rotation of the shoulder from back to front or the inside out in Adho Mukha Svanasana is a location of the joint, whereas the generational hunch we gain from time sitting at computers and typing, directionally is a shoulder dislocation. Rotating back into the joint and maintaining the connection into the joint keeps it healthy.

Jawahar also encouraged us to practice transitioning from Utthita Hasta Padasana to Parsva Hasta Padasana by lifting up the knees and thighs, taking the thighs back creating the connection into the hips. Holding the connection into the hips lifting the toes on the leg that will rotate, rotating through 90 degrees using the heel of the foot as the pivot point whilst maintaining the connection into the hips. Then carefully lowering the toes whilst maintaining the lift of the leg into the hip socket. He encouraged us to maintain the grip into the hip joint throughout the asana and whilst coming out.

We experienced the connection into the hips in Paschimottanasana using a belt wrapped around the feet. The belt passes around the outside of both feet, the tails of the belt then pass through the center between the feet and back across the arch of the feet creating a crossover of the belt at the 5th metatarsal tuberosity, sometimes known as the marble bone of the foot.

We also worked a lot on Virabhadrasana 1, a pose Jawahar said was the least practiced pose.

As I recall the three days I find myself smiling. This was the first convention I had attended since the pandemic forced us all into our homes and it was fabulous to catch up with old friends, friends only ever previously met online and make new friends. We were blessed with beautiful sunshine, a lovely venue in the Harrogate convention center, and a great teacher.

The Next ORIY workshop with Margaret Rawlinson

We are delighted to welcome Margaret to Newbury on **Sunday 22nd October** at **Speen Hall RG14 1RJ** just a 'stone's throw' from the A34 so very convenient for people

travelling from the various parts of our region – more information about the day will be circulated nearer the time.



Margaret is a Senior level III Iyengar Yoga teacher, and has been teaching since 1979. She has visited the Iyengar Yoga Institute (RIMYI) in Pune, India many times and was privileged to have been taught by BKS Iyengar himself; as well as his daughter, Geeta, and son, Prashant and now granddaughter Abhijata – who has taken up the mantel from her revered

grandfather. Margaret has also studied remedial yoga with Stephanie Quirke (who worked directly with the Iyengar's in Pune for many years)

Margaret has developed, over the years, through her experience in Yoga, pranayama, meditation and Chinese Medicine, a complete practice in order to reach a deeper spiritual awareness. It is a lifetime's learning process, a very exciting and stimulating journey. She has boundless love and passion for her practice and her teaching and finds it very rewarding to help her pupils discover a deeper level of Yogic awareness. She has understanding and knowledge for finding ways to practice with difficulties or injuries.



WHEATEN BREAD

INGREDIENTS

Serves: 16 slices

- 300 grams wholewheat bread flour
- 100 grams plain flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon bicarbonate of soda
- 60 grams butter (or margarine)
- 2 tablespoons caster sugar
- 300 millilitres buttermilk
- 1 tablespoon rolled oats



METHOD

1. Preheat your oven to 200°C/gas mark 6.
2. Place the flours, salt and bicarb in a bowl, stirring to combine.
3. Using your fingertips, rub in the margarine until the mixture resembles fine breadcrumbs.
4. Add the sugar, and stir to combine.
5. Gradually stir in the buttermilk until you get a soft, but not sticky, dough. You won't need to use all of it. Don't worry too much if it is sticky, though (mine frequently is). Just dust with some extra flour!
6. Turn out onto a floured surface, and briefly knead the dough (with your knuckles). Pop the dough into a lightly floured 20 cm cake tin, and shape into a round. (You can use a loaf tin if you prefer and want to get similar sized slices.)
7. Using a sharp knife, mark the dough into four farls (Farl comes from the Gaelic word fardel. It means quarter.) Brush the surface with a little extra buttermilk, then sprinkle over the oats (or some additional flour).
8. Bake for approximately 30 minutes! I do find it takes longer to cook than they say.
9. A cake tester should come out pretty much clean when it is ready.



Enjoy the rest of the summer