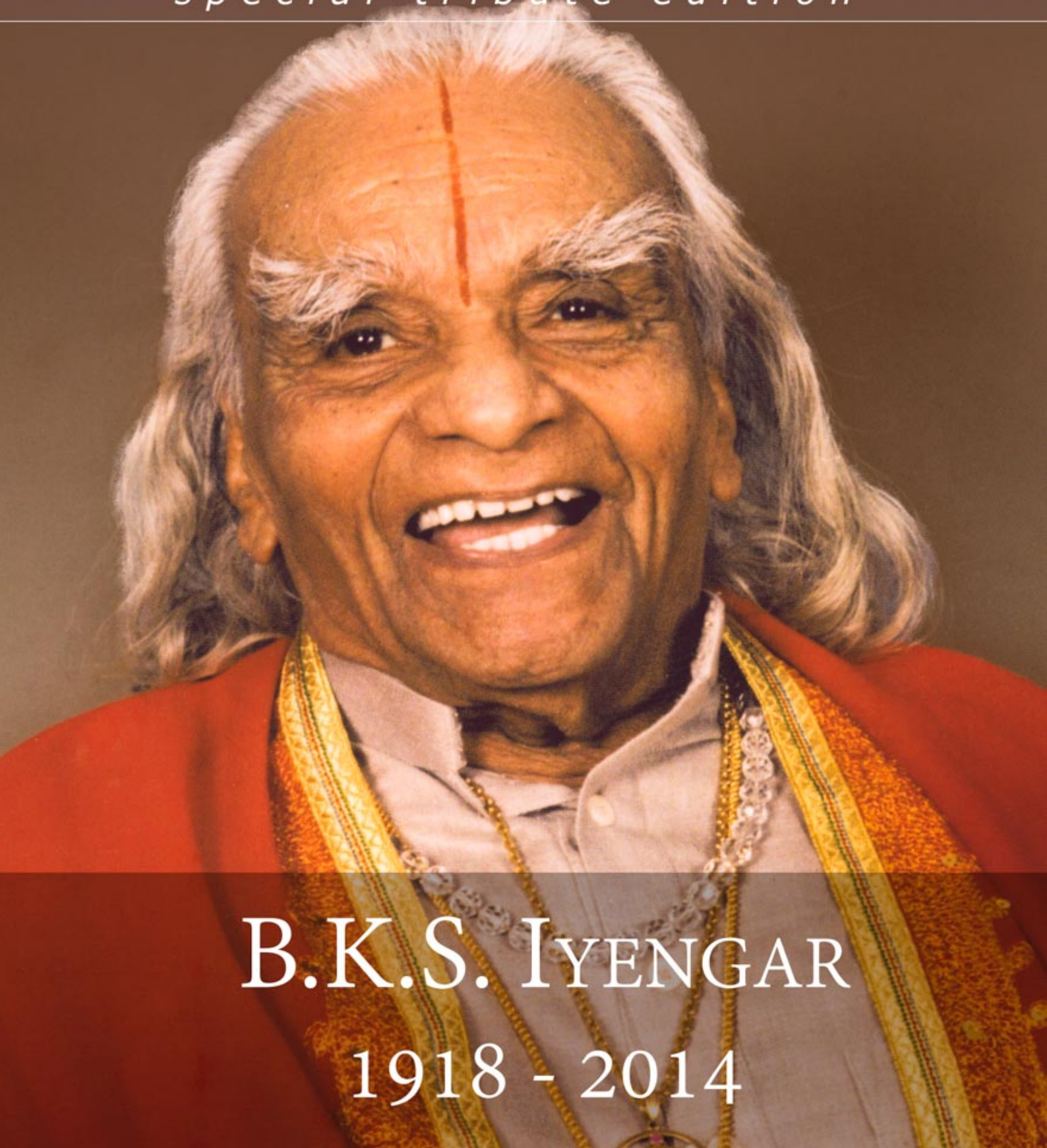


Term 4, 2014

Sadhaka

special tribute edition



B.K.S. IYENGAR

1918 - 2014

Sadhaka

The Yoga Mandir Student Newsletter

Editor's message



YOGACHARYA BKS IYENGAR ('Guruji' as he was known to us) died on August 20 at the age of 95.

Directly and indirectly he has transformed the lives of countless people across the globe, including my own. In this special edition of Sadhaka our contributors share stories of their interactions with Guruji and reflect upon what he has meant to them.

Alan emphasises how Guruji spurred him to practice with unrelenting commitment. Guruji had a similarly profound impact on a like-minded group of 'contemporaries' to Alan who, like him, are now senior Iyengar teachers. What a privileged experience they had! What significant life choices they made! What a blessing for us that they did that, as they now

carry on the Iyengar lineage through their own teaching.

In Sally Mumford's article we feel the strong thread of continuity and inspiration that Guruji, his family and the Institute provided to those who studied at Pune over the course of their lives. In turn, her story reinforces the important role that Yoga continues to play as we evolve through life's various stages.

These articles, in addition to the numerous other tributes we received, reveal how Guruji touched so many individuals in so many ways - whether through his teachings, the role model he provided, the global community he fostered, or simply just in passing - be it a joyful smile, a shared presence in the library or a playful interaction in the yoga room.

Finally, Fran Tolhurst directs us to further reading by reviewing *Iyengar: His Life and Works*, a compilation of writings that "bear witness to the man BKS Iyengar was and are tributes to his courage, his toughness and compassion, and his absolute devotion to Yoga..."

On a personal note, the most outstanding aspect of Guruji is his lifelong commitment to practice. As Alan says "the only knowledge that was relevant was the knowledge gained from one's own experience; practice-based learning". This is the true legacy that Guruji has left us - the imperative to keep going back to the mat and seeing what rises!

I hope you enjoy this tribute edition.

Peta Keaney

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Reflecting on Iyengar

by Alan Goode, August 2014, India

I'VE WALKED DOWN this road many times over more than 30 years. The trees are a little taller, the roads have improved with gutters and the piles of rubbish that were worked by small families who lived under plastic sheeting beside the storm water have gone, along with the family of pigs who shared the takings. On the sidewalk are a few hawkers that sell fruit and veg to local households as they wheel their barrows along shouting their wares. Mangy dogs sleep nearby.

There is a park that opens its gates for people to come and walk amongst the trees, to run or for children to play on the equipment. Beyond the park is a stall selling *chai* and *upma* where students gather after class to chat and exchange their observations and experiences. By Indian standards this is an affluent well-kept suburb named Model Colony and this is where BKS Iyengar opened his Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute in the city of Pune in 1975 after his wife's death in 1973. He built it with the support of his students from throughout the world. After decades of teaching, he had arrived.

The institute is pyramidal in shape and covers four levels including the library in the basement, the entrance hall and change rooms. Above this sits the hall where classes are conducted and then the *pranayama* room. At the pinnacle is a shrine to Hannuman the monkey god. It's a unique building.

Much has changed from my first trip in 1983. In those early visits one would drop off the map on entering India. Calling home was not really an option, changing travellers cheques could take half the day and an aerogram would often arrive after you had returned home.

We would often go to morning class or practice then stay to assist the 9.30am class before going for breakfast and to take notes. We would return to practice in the afternoon at 4pm, and then assist or observe the 6pm class. The days were full and intense but this was why we came. It was a chance to step out of our own world and immerse ourselves in the practice and be taught by the Iyengar family: Guruji, his daughter Geeta and son Prashant. The otherworldliness of a month of study surrounded by the culture of India and the dislocation supported the study.

There was always an air of translation. The need to make sense of what was being said because the Indian English was unfamiliar and at times words were used in ways that conveyed meaning differently or made you reassess the actions. The language was brought into the service of communicating an experience rather than simply to describe an action. It was something I had never experienced before. The language made me go inwards. You might be asked to *churn the abdomen* rather than *turn the abdomen* within a twist and this took me into myself to examine what I felt and what was happening in my abdomen. Guruji was inventing language, just as he invented so much else, in his search to understand, and through this, to teach. We, as his students, were recording the asanas in our bodies through the experience of his teaching rather than recording what he taught. As he had done, we were learning to study ourselves through a practice.



Hare Krishna Mandir Road, Pune

Photo: Alan Goode

One of the things I gained from these many trips was that the learning was not always where you would expect. If you came with expectations these were often upturned, or illness could lay you up for a week or more. So it was best to come without conditions, to adapt to the challenges, to meet the demands of the class and to study yourself and your reactions so as not to blame others or the circumstances for your own difficulties when they arose.

The Iyengar family were endlessly giving and selfless in the teaching. Guruji was demanding and unending in his quest to delve, examine and confront the slightest hint of conditional practice or the whiff of fears and desires informing the actions in his students. He was creative and uncompromising. Central to Iyengar's method is an acknowledgement that what we see in our actions is a visible expression of our underlying thoughts and feelings. By studying our actions in *asana* we can observe the expression of the *vrttis* and *klesas* (volatilities and mental afflictions). The development of timings arose from this inward-looking study.

The ethics of the practice were always at the fore too and you were asked to sift yourself as to your motivation, your intention, within each *asana*. Through his own self-study (*svadhyaya*) he concluded that the *yamas* and *niyamas* (2 of the 8 *astanga* limbs) existed within the practice as distinct from practices in themselves. He demanded that his students scrutinise themselves for acquisition, covetousness and so on.

Strongest for me however was always the Yoga hall where Guruji would often practice early in the morning together with those who came to join. In the early light he would be seen doing the *asanas* and this was such an inspiring message—the way to understanding was through the practice. It was more potent than anything he said and yet backed up what he said and made it all the more significant because he was communicating his understanding of practice. What was being communicated is reflected in this quote from Svātmanāma in the *Hatha Yoga Pradīpikā*:

- 1:64 *Any person who is not lethargic can obtain yoga, be he young, old, very old, sick or weak.*
- 1:65 *One who is intent on practice will obtain yoga, not one who is idle.*
- 1:66 *Yoga is not obtained by reading scriptures, nor by wearing the dress of a yogini, nor by talking about it. Practice alone is the course of success.*



Main teaching hall, RIMYI

Photo: Alan Goode

He has gone now, having died this last week, and we, his students have gathered from across the globe to acknowledge this man and his effects on us, as individuals, and collectively. This possibly is the thing that conveys the most. For many of us making our way to India since the news of his death, his influence was profound. Something in what he communicated made us want to make this practice the centre of our lives. We re-directed ourselves to make practising and teaching yoga our purpose. He communicated his experience and through his teaching we were made to delve deep within ourselves too. **We gave up jobs and careers, we worked alone on our mats and lived simple lives that put practice based learning as our priority.** That he had this effect upon so many is also significant. Of that generation throughout the 1970-1980s many have now become his senior teachers.

Whilst there is sadness and loss there is also for me a recognition that this is timely.

I'll walk to the institute today to pay my respects and say goodbye to him and then return to my home to continue. This was his key message and what he taught me. The only knowledge that was relevant was the knowledge gained from one's own practice experience; practice-based learning. In this I don't feel lost nor in need of him. His message was clearly based in the lineage of Patanjali's Yoga. Through a practice (*tapas*) we learn to study ourselves (*svadhyaya*) and this provides the means to transcend the veneer of personality (*isvara pranidhana*) in order to develop a deeper understanding of who we are...

*"It is not speech we should want to know: we should know the speaker.
It is not things seen which we should want to know: we should know the seer.
It is not sounds we should want to know: we should know the hearer.
It is not mind which we should want to know: WE SHOULD KNOW THE THINKER."*
- from the Kaushitaki Upanishad

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My time at the Institute: a tribute to Guruji

by Sally Mumford

MY FIRST VISIT to the Institute was in December 1996. I had only been doing Iyengar Yoga for four years, had just started teaching in a haphazard way, and was off to Pune for two months with a friend from Darwin. Vivid is the memory of walking down the Institute driveway, taking my shoes off, washing my feet in the tiny ladies' room and walking up the narrow stairway decorated with tokens from Iyengar's life and achievements. Then to enter the main practice room, with its marble floor and garlanded statue of Patanjali, was to step into a place where time stopped, the senses sharpened and you could only be but present. From the first day, I fell in love with that space. Guruji's energy was imbibed in every corner; whether he was physically present or not, he was there in your Yoga.

In the first visit Prashant taught most of my classes. He demands of you to inquire deeply into your motivations to practice, not to just accept knowledge or Guruji's teachings but to experience Yoga in an elemental way as well as in the more subtle *kosas*. I was challenged mentally as well as physically. We did a lot of wall rope work, especially rope 2, holding it while Prashant came along the line, pressing his foot firmly down into everyone's sacrum, amidst much groaning.



Ganesh altar at Guruji's funeral

Photo: Alan Goode

To practice at the Institute became one of the great things about being there. In contrast to the classes, which were crowded and required a certain tenacity to keep hold of your mat and props, practice times were the opposite, quiet and serene. There was a depth to the practice that is hard to replicate elsewhere. Each morning Guruji would be there, in his practice as you were in yours. To observe Guruji's constancy of coming back again and again to the mat has been a great motivation to me, particularly as I did not have access to a regular teacher and classes for many years.

My friend and I would sit on the stairs and observe Geeta's teaching. She was always awesome, a mixture of fury and compassion. Her penetrating eyes missed nothing, neither did her wit.

The next time I visited was in 2004. I had 2 children by then, so I relished the time and space just to immerse myself unhurriedly in my practice, uncluttered with domestic concerns and the needs of others. I mainly attended Geeta's classes. She demanded absolute attention and each class was a transformative experience. At this time there was also a women's intensive going on. At the end of it we were gifted with a demonstration, which to me was a highlight from the intensive. Five women, displaying five milestones of womanhood (adolescence, menstruation, pregnancy, pre- and post-menopause) were set up in various poses with appropriate props and adjustments. Geeta encouraged us all, with her depth of understanding, to honour, respect and care for our bodies in whatever stage of life we were in.

My last visit was in 2007. This time I spent all my spare time in the library. Afternoons were spent reading, studying and soaking up the wonderful atmosphere there. Most days Guruji would be at his desk, writing and graciously receiving visitors. *Chai* would be offered all round and there would be quiet chatter and laughter as well as companionable silence. In this visit Guruji radiated *santosh*, he was so at peace with the world.

Each visit had a cultural element, a dance or musical performance and a talk. We would dress in our Indian finery, be served food and receive a blessing from Guruji and with each visit my love and sense of gratitude would grow. My heart would open wide just walking into the Institute. **Grace, humility and everyday ordinariness rolled into exceptional giving, was Guruji.** You would see him in his practice, intent and absorbed, then at another time, relaxing on his banana lounge outside his home, sipping tea and smiling to everyone as they left class.

Even though I was never taught directly by Guruji, being at the Institute, surrounded by his light has shaped my life in profound ways. He lived fully in the *yamas* and *niyamas*, uncorrupted by his fame, never wavering from the essence of the teachings of Patanjali, or straying away from his practice. I hold his light in my heart and on my mat.

Sally holds a Introductory Level 2 Certificate with the BKS Iyengar Association of Australia and teaches at Yoga Mandir



Guruji's funeral procession

Photo: Alan Goode

More tributes to Guruji

" I wasn't expecting to feel so enchanted by Mr Iyengar when my eyes first saw him and yet there I was unable to look away. What struck me was the playfulness of his eyes. He smiled endlessly whilst students respectfully greeted him. Mr Iyengar then unrobed and, bare chested, started to practice. No fuss and nothing particularly fancy, a few standing poses to the trestler. He must have been so used to students watching him, I thought. He just got on with it. Or so I thought. His granddaughter was on the other side of the room, and seeing something in her performance of urdhva dhanurasna, Mr Iyengar shot over. Instantly he was on his back under her back arch, pressing his two feet up on her sacrum. They both started laughing out loud! I didn't hear what had been said but he laughed and laughed and the whole room seemed to smile. It was such a human interaction: A man playing with his granddaughter in the company of strangers. I felt really lucky to have seen Mr Iyengar in the midst of his everyday life, and am honoured to try and follow his steps."

- Ann Dragon, North Perth Yoga Room

" One day we were coming down the stairs after morning practice and early class, when we were signalled by Mr Iyengar's attendants to wait and make way for him. He had paused at the bottom of the three stairs to make his way to the office. He was wearing his fresh white silks and was gathering himself to go up the stairs. We all stopped in respectful awe and I mentally shouted "You can do it!" He looked right into me and broke into a beautiful smile of recognition, then proceeded to make his way past. "

- Joan Keigler, Yoga Mandir

"Although Guruji was best known for being a yoga teacher, his teachings resonated with me on a far broader theme: how to be a human being. Through him I feel we've all learned about living life with ethics and morality; how to investigate issues that need attention and how to make the changes to move your life forward for the better. "

- Lara Favelle, Busselton Yoga Centre

" BKS Iyengar (Guruji) has given me so much. He has given me the beginnings of an understanding of the power of a practice to affect a life in a profound way. He has given me a community of fellow practitioners and a collection of senior teachers, who provide me with immense inspiration and a direct conduit to his masterful teachings. He has given me a body of literature that I find myself diving into for guidance in my practice and my teaching. He has given me the seeds of aspiration and the tools to take this lifelong journey of investigation into a practice of yoga. He lives on for me in my practice, my teaching, my teacher, the Iyengar Yoga community, his family and Institute. "

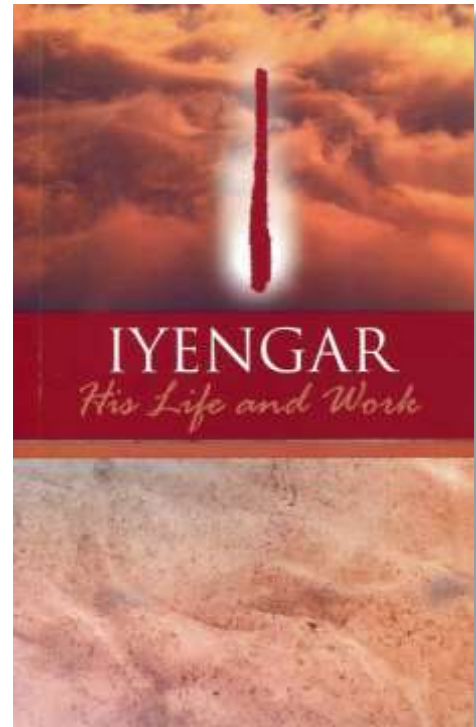
- Chris O'Reilly, Yoga Mandir

Book review

by Fran Tolhurst

IYENGAR: HIS LIFE AND WORK (compiled by BKS Iyengar 60th Birthday Celebration Committee, (1987) USA: Timeless Books) is a collection of writings by BKS Iyengar, his students and family recorded up until the 1980s. All the contributions in their own way bear witness to the man BKS Iyengar was and are tributes to his courage, his toughness and compassion, and his absolute devotion to Yoga which in his words is "pure nectar to the body, mind and soul."

The writing by Iyengar is in part autobiographical recalling his most difficult years as he worked to deepen his practice and establish himself as a respected teacher of Yoga. But there are also a number of articles which include detailed descriptions and interpretations of different aspects of Yoga. His ideas and thoughts are also highlighted in the many interviews and public talks he gave over his lifetime. The other section of the book is made up of a series of short articles and extracts which were mostly written by his students and are personal recollections of their time with Iyengar - their thoughts and memories of his teaching, his persona, and his profound influence in their lives.



These articles leave little doubt as to why Iyengar has contributed so significantly to the extraordinary spread of Yoga in the West in the past 50 years. However, Iyengar was not without his critics and as revealed in the book, he often found himself explaining how *asanas* (yogic postures) could in themselves bring a person to the ultimate goal of Yoga, *samadhi*. "The body must be conquered before it becomes divine" (p 262). It was Iyengar's total conviction that the training of the body brings restraint to the mind. He explains, "while performing the asanas, due to the tremendous extension creating vastness in the body, space is created between the senses and the mind... these asanas were given so that the mind can be drawn in slowly and detached from the senses" (p235-6).

This book offers great insights into Iyengar who in the words of one writer was "a most vigorous teacher", only asking of his students to have "the ardent desire to learn"; a scientist and healer – deeply committed to a person's wellness, but insistent on giving back responsibility to the person for their own well-being; an artist who Yehudi Menuhin once described as "exacting, tenacious and as fanatical as any artist must be." **So often in this book, Iyengar is described as a genius for his extraordinary intuition into human nature and the connections between the body, mind and soul.** What also comes through very strongly is his humility and gratitude to the practice of Yoga which he said shows us "a way towards right living."

It is not easy to capture a lifetime of action in a book like this but this book certainly goes a long way in giving the reader a clearer sense of who Iyengar was, his work and his thoughts on his life's greatest passion.

Although published in 1987, a limited number of copies of this book are still available new and second hand through online bookstores such as Amazon and The Book Depository.

Fran is an editor of Sadhaka. She studies at Flametree Yoga Studio in Darwin.

Community program and announcements

<https://www.yogamandir.com.au/program/community-program>

Mid-term lecture

On Saturday 1st November, Alan's mid-term lecture is titled '*The Conscious Pause*'. Practice is not merely the development of concentration, but the breaking down of psychological time. Why is this important and where is it seen in teaching? The 1-hour talk starts at 6pm in Studio 1. Please pre-enrol via the Institute's website at <https://www.yogamandir.com.au/form/public-lecture-distinguishing-features-iyengar-yoga>.

Social event

The next social event will take place at 6pm on Sunday 9th November.

This event will be a tribute to BKS Iyengar who died on 20th August 2014. Two films highlighting his mid-life teaching will be shown.

Entry will be by way of a \$10 donation towards the Scholarship Fund. Please bring a plate of vegetarian food to share. Further details will be posted on the website's Social Events page: <https://www.yogamandir.com.au/program/social-events-program>.

Scholarship program

To date two scholarships have been awarded for students to attend the Otford Retreat. Additional scholarships have been awarded for 2 students to attend the Early Morning Intensive. To donate, apply or find out more, please visit <https://www.yogamandir.com.au/program/scholarship-program>.

Backbender for sale



Foldaway timber backbender, as new. Purchased from iyogaprops last year. Cost \$345 but will sell for \$250

Contact Alice on 0409 967 544

Contribute to Sadhaka!

Sadhaka aims to give a voice to Yoga Mandir students at all levels, from beginners to senior teachers. So we would love to hear from you! In particular, we are looking for:

- Any comments or feedback you may have on this edition;
- Comments on general issues in the community pertinent to Yoga;
- Inspirational quotes, preferably original (otherwise please include source);
- Articles for publication. Sadhaka places emphasis on aspects of yoga practice outside *asana* technique, i.e. 'off the mat'.

Feel free to email sadhaka@yogamandir.com.au if you feel you have something to contribute.