

## Reflections on the January, 1987 Intensive Poona, India

An essay by Arthur Kilmurray.

For those of us leaving from the Bay Area, the January 1987 intensive began with a gruelling 50-hour journey that included a twenty-hour flight from San Francisco to Singapore, nine hours of dazed wandering around in the Singapore airport and another four hours of late-night tossing and turning on the filthy floor of an obscure observation deck at the Bombay airport. Needless to say, we arrived in Poona in a state of silly exhaustion that left us totally empty and open. In retrospect, it was a perfect prelude to the three weeks to come. The exhaustion was soon converted to elation, but the silliness remained throughout (outside of class, of course). It was a fun group and we had a great time together. The overall enjoyability of the intensive was in large part due to the great mood of the Iyengars: Guruji, Geeta and Prashant. Pleasantness of mind (citta prasadena), indeed, joy, pervaded the energy of the classes. Of course Guruji was often rather acerbic in his descriptions of our incompetence, but one sensed he was using this means to get our attention so that he could emphasize the need for greater sensitivity and self-awareness in the poses. Geeta's joyous good mood was injected into the psychic mixture, and thus the classroom energy never became heavy or somber. We were also endlessly fascinated by Prashant's esoteric and subtle commentary and imaginative use of props - belts, weights, benches and ropes- to facilitate his exotic postural meditations.

Geeta's detailed planning and organization of the three-week program were impressive to us. From the opening minutes of the first class to the winding down of the last day, there was a brilliant orchestration of action, observation, and description. The underlying logic connecting various sequences of poses was directly experienced and investigated. Fundamental poses, mastery of which leads to safe practice of more difficult asanas, were practiced over and over. We explored the use of ropes and chairs as aids to move progressively into deeper and deeper backbends. Pranayama classes were especially enlightening, as Geeta led us into deep and subtle states of savasana which serve as the starting point for a true pranayama practice. (She feels that we are all in too much of a hurry to work on the upper floors of pranayama, before the foundation has been built and stabilized.)

There was an enormous amount to absorb in a short period of time. By surrendering to the flow of the classes and opening myself to the subtle energies being awakened, I was able to pay the demanding attention to detail that Guruji inspired without overloading my frontal brain. In this way, the subtleties became much more than words and memorized facts, but

rather became living experiences in my cells and nerve fibers. This is a relatively new experience for me, but it is a foreshadowing of an awakening of sensitivity that Guruji repeatedly emphasizes. I came away from the intensive with an urge and an urgency to penetrate into the essence of this developing sensitivity, which to me is the source of Guruji's genius and the key to the Iyengar system.

The essence of this practice is described in his discourse on . Samyama in Asana (see IYI Review Vol. 6 #2, October 1985). As Guruji describes in this article, the skin cells, muscle cells and bone-joint cells all communicate with each other in the creation of a perfect asana. From this communication comes an inner intelligence that organically draws the body into proper alignment. "There is a tremendous communication between the organs of action and the organs of perception." This can be seen as the integration of the sensory and motor pathways of the voluntary nervous system. In the motor system, which involves the organs of action (in asana, the arms and legs), outgoing signals leave the brain and go the periphery. These signals cause the muscles to act or release. The organs of perception (in asana, the inner lining of the skin and the joint proprioceptors) send signals back to the brain informing it of the results created by the organs of action. Skillful action must be accompanied by skillful perception. This skillful perception, this receiving movement, is meditation in asana.

Time and again Guruji demonstrated how insensitive we are to our own skin, muscle, and bone cells. The common tendency for most of us is to create the pose from a memory of past instructions and experiences, with only a little direct communication with the skin, flesh and bones. We practice skillful action, but without skillful reception, or perception, we get stuck in a form that may look nice on the surface but lacks depth and sensitivity. Under Guruji's watchful eyes, sharp tongue and delicate touch, this receptive intelligence can be awakened. However, only the student, through hours, weeks, and years of intense practice (ahyasa) and detached desirelessness (vairagya) can bring this sensitivity to fruition.

After fifty years of intense inner exploration of this art, Guruji still feels that the depths of yoga are infinite, and his knowledge is but a single drop in that infinite ocean. I wonder how many of us students truly have that depth of humility in respect to the art and science of yoga. I feel that our lack of respect for the infinite depth of yoga is what hurts Guruji most of all and sets off his anger at his students. As practitioners of the art of yoga, we must cultivate both humility and sensitivity. Humility comes from the word humus or earth, and actually means of the earth or down to earth. The humility that Guruji practices

comes from a deep grounding into the center of the earth and the cosmos. Thus humility and sensitivity go hand in hand, being two aspects of the same experience. To develop this sensitivity and humility, as Guruji stated elsewhere at the 1984 Convention, objective knowledge must become subjective knowledge. The ideas, concepts, and words must be transformed, through diligent practice, into living, pure intelligence of the entire body. There is tremendous power in the precision of kinesiological truth. The refinement of this process continues on in the present moment as the entire universe feeds the awakening and flowering of the human consciousness through the DNA, the cells, and the nervous system.

A major burst of creative energy will surge through the planet this summer in Cambridge, Mass. when the North American Iyengar community gathers together for the 1987 convention with Guruji orchestrating the experience. I hope you can join us there.

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## **Summer Programs at the Institute**

This summer the Iyengar Yoga Institute of San Francisco will offer a six-week session of teacher training classes, from July 2 through August 12. Introductory classes in this program are open to those who have practiced hatha yoga for at least one year, preferably with a teacher. Our teacher training program includes coursework in asana, pranayama, anatomy, physiology and philosophy.

We will also offer a special one-week intensive "Deepening Your Yoga Practice", from June 21-28. In addition to morning asana classes, the one-week intensive course will feature five pranayama classes, plus classes on yoga philosophy and discussion groups. The one-week course is open to students of all levels.

The brochure for both of these programs is now available. Call or write us if you have not yet received one, or would like additional ones for your students.