

# YOGA VIDYA

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## Men and Yoga

INTERVIEW FROM YOGA RAHASYA

### Prashant on Guruji, and on Practice

BY ALEX MEDIN

#### On Guruji

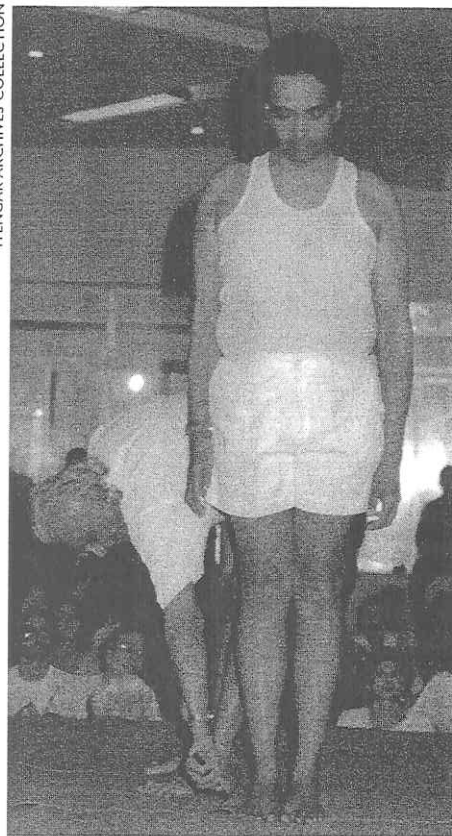
##### What exactly did your father teach you?

The teaching of yoga is different from any other endeavor such as the teaching of music, art or academics, where somebody teaches you and you learn from that person. The study of yoga is an *adhyatma sadhana* (the study of one's own self)). You are supposed to explore your self, your mind, awareness, consciousness and conscience, your whole being.

In yoga, we should not just copy what is taught to us. We should rather try to reach what is understood by us, and we should equally practice what is learned by us. A teacher might teach us in one way, we interpret and assume we understand, but what are we actually taking in? Unfortunately, many times we are not able to register what a teacher is actually teaching. So, naturally, there will be many misunderstandings and misinterpretations.

The subject of yoga is different in this way. We need to understand ourselves. "This is my body, this is my mind, this is my intelligence, and this is my emotional substance." Then we need to approach how to deal with it. I cannot deal with it all in exactly the same way as my father dealt with it as it is an *adhyatma sadhana*. It is very subjective, individualistic. Hence, we need to find our own way.

IYENGAR ARCHIVES COLLECTION



Guruji instructs Prashant in Tadasana

There is not much sense in trying to see and follow a great man. I can see the conduct of a great man, and follow that great man. But, I will not be able to see why he conducts himself like that. Learning is not just plagiarism, behaviorism or mannerism. I cannot just pick up his mannerisms and his conduct. My icon, my idol might be Ramakrishna Paramhansa, Ramana Maharshi. I may assume how they conducted their lives, but I will never be able to know the facts and reasons behind it.

Yoga is very, very subjective. It is also

*cont. on page 3*

### Restorative *Asanas* for Men

BY MISS GEETA S. IYENGAR

The inversions play a great role in keeping the endocrine system of men as well as women in order. Men, too, need the restorative *asanas*, the supine *asanas*, to recover from fatigue as much as women. Women normally do selected forward extensions along with supine *asanas* and perhaps supported *Dwi Pada Viparita Dandasana* and *Setu Bandha Sarvangasana* during menstruation. This particular sequence, recommended to women, is not prohibited at all for men, though men do not menstruate. It is as important for men as it is for women to maintain hormonal balance, emotional stability and to remove fatigue and check aggressiveness. In fact, men should make it a regular routine to practice inversions, forward extensions and supine *asanas*, at least once a week in order to keep themselves free from high blood pressure, diabetes, hormonal and emotional disturbances as well as anger and desire. Then peace of mind follows.

#### Balancing the Hormonal System

The chemical hormonal changes keep on occurring every month in women and show the changes in the physical and mental health of her body, whereas such visible indications are not found in men. Men are lucky, since the physiological clock is not within to alarm them. Yet, they cannot forget the fact that in their case the change is found suddenly, at a particular age and they too get disturbed.

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**B.K.S. Iyengar Celebrates his 90th Birthday!** See pages 8-9

# One Man's Perspective

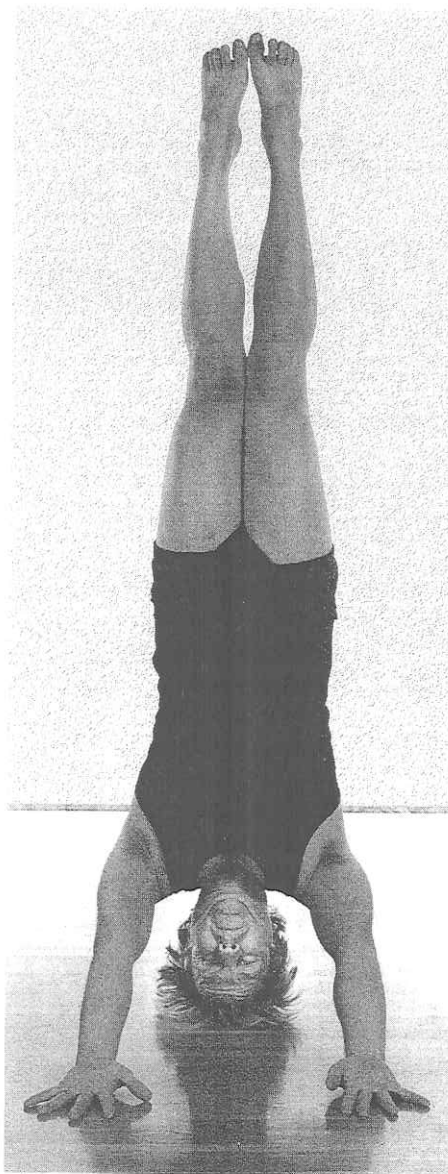
BY GARTH McLEAN

It was a hot day in May, 1996, when I found myself struggling to walk. After a high stress, globe-trotting, entertainment industry job, I was producing a play in Hollywood and figuring out what was next. Oddly, for about a month my body had been progressively losing functionality. Simple tasks, like holding a pen, shaving, or eating with a fork, had become virtually impossible. Mysterious symptoms crept through me, robbed me of my motor skills and rendered my body numb. Something was very wrong.

In a manly effort to show no weakness, I pressed on. When the numbness overtook my face and skull, I contacted the UCLA neurology department and was immediately admitted to the hospital for medical examinations. After a suspected brain or spinal tumor was ruled out, I was relieved to be diagnosed with Relapsing Remitting Multiple Sclerosis (MS).

Once the storm in my body subsided, with the help of intravenous steroids, I was released from the hospital. With a pocketful of meds, in shock, and my doc's advice to try yoga, I was determined to face my new reality and overcome this challenge. A friend recommended Iyengar Yoga. So I picked myself up and stumbled into the LA Institute. I was thrown a life line by Manouso Manos, Karin O'Bannon and others who guided me in daily classes.

My physical, mental, and psychological health improved radically. This yoga was working! Inspired, relieved, and willing to take a risk, I chose to forego the pharmaceutical protocol and embraced a daily practice of yoga, along with dietary and lifestyle changes. The environment at the LA Institute was a change from my Hollywood surroundings. I found myself in a world populated mostly by women. A nurturing environment that often addressed female concerns, I was regularly among women who were menstruating or facing other female challenges. Rather than feel emasculated, I was encouraged to look at myself and to



Garth McLean practicing Mukta Hasta Sirsasana

respect what was going on in my body on any given day. I began to develop a more intuitive approach to practice, knowing when to impose my masculine will and when to ease up to offer my body what it needed that day.

I soon discovered Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, and learned that we have these things called *vrttis* (fluctuations of consciousness). Left unchecked, I imagined that my *vrttis* manifested on the physical plane as MS symptoms, or disease. I learned that *abhyasa* and *vairagya*

(practice and detachment) are the means to still the fluctuating movements of consciousness. It was an Ah-Ha! moment.

With my resolve fortified, I looked to *abhyasa* and *vairagya* to help me chart the potentially turbulent waters in my life. I needed to practice without being attached to the results. This offered a further challenge – a guy likes something solid he can relate to. The reflective mirror of practice rang true, offered concrete experiential knowledge, kept me present, and offered a rigorously honest look at my abilities and limitations. By remaining focused, I could vanquish the past. A whole new world opened up. I was alert, confident, and grounded in reality. After several years of practice and restored health, I was inspired to study at the Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute (RIMYI) in Pune.

Excited to meet the man whose work has had such a profound effect on my life, I shared my story with B.K.S. Iyengar. His advice: "Every day you must walk that fine line between courage and caution."

Strength, ego and grit are traits often synonymous with being a man. With my MS in check and Guruji's advice resonating, my practice began to unfold. Fear and doubt can hold us back in life and our exploration of the Self. As a man, I summon *abhyasa* and *vairagya* as I strive to overcome these obstacles. When I drop back into *Urdhva Dhanurasana* from *Tadasana*, for example, *abhyasa* encourages me to maintain discipline, connect the legs to the spine, and do, while *vairagya* cautions me to place my ego and attachment to the result aside, exercise discretion and restraint, and not overdo. Heeding their counsel, I find stillness, confidence, and contentment.

Over the years, I have weathered several storms of MS relapse. In the midst of any volatile storm, the challenge is to put uncertainty and fear aside, continue with dedication and release

cont. on page 12

One Man's ..., cont. from page 5

attachment to the outcome. A little faith helps, along with Guruji's advice in *Light on Life* – to apply intelligence and memory to map the present and future. Consistently the practice restores calm.

Recently, while enjoying a hike, my weaker right leg gave way ...slipping ... losing balance ... right leg buckles, turns, twists Whoa!! ... downhill fall...AGONIZING PAIN!! Result: severe right meniscus tear. *Padmasana* and *pindasana* cycles, cornerstones of my *asana* practice were abruptly altered. Within months, I discovered a lump. So together with my doc we took a look under the hood to see what was going on – a chronic, dilated duct in the spermatic system, plus non-containment of the prostate gland, both on my right side, which has been weakened by the MS.

I was and am in no immediate danger, but feeling somewhat unsure, I figured best to stop – ask for directions. So I made my way back to Pune and was blessed to receive guidance from Guruji and Geetaji, assisted by Manousou.

Right now a little maintenance is required on this vehicle that houses my soul. I trust that intelligently employing the tools of courage, caution, practice, and detachment will keep the body healthy and put any fear and doubt to bed.

Guruji's advice was echoed in a conversation with Prashantji regarding *mula bandha kriya*, "We must shift out of first gear. Otherwise the engine will burn out." With Guruji's inspiration, and Geetaji's compassionate skillful guidance, I am learning to apply Patanjali's philosophical aspects to realistic action and move beyond mere physical practice. As Guruji recently said, "Why polish your old Self? Polish your new Self!" ■

*Garth McLean is an Intermediate Junior II Certified Iyengar Yoga Teacher. He teaches regular classes at IYILA and workshops on Yoga and MS, locally and nationally.*



## The Institute and Southern California

### Institute News



#### The Iyengar Yoga Institute of Los Angeles is Up and Running!

The new location is bright, beautiful and ripe for supporting the expansion of Iyengar Yoga in Los Angeles and Southern California. Between January and August 2008, the community raised more than \$280,000 to fund the relocation and renovation. An entirely raw space has been transformed into a fully functioning Iyengar Yoga Institute. It has been sanctified with a formal puja, celebrated with an open house, and blessed by Guruji in ceremonies that began on August 29, 2008.

### What's Happening at IYILA

#### A Bright, Beautiful New Space

The new Iyengar Yoga Institute location is fully equipped and state of the art. It has bamboo floors, skylights, an expanded rope wall, props for seventy-five students, beautiful paint colors, spacious new bathrooms, roomier changing areas, and a welcoming, peaceful lobby. The partitioned *asana* rooms are larger, and can be joined for workshops and other events. In addition, there is unlimited parking and an expanded retail section of books and props, including mats, blankets, blocks, straps, chairs, bolsters, sandbags, slant boards, and eye wraps. Classes are taught daily. Info: [www.iyila.org](http://www.iyila.org)

#### Guruji's Blessings

Guruji has given spiritual, material, and practical encouragement to IYILA during its current relocation. He recorded a video interview with Karin O'Bannon in June, which included a blessing for the Institute's new home. He generously donated funds to IYILA for the puja ceremony and for the grand opening celebration. With these personal blessings, Guruji continues to inspire the transmission of yogic teaching via spaces and communities dedicated to the subject of yoga.



*Sri Krishnamacharya Samudrala performing the puja, with Eric Small*

#### IYILA at the Farmers Market

As part of its community outreach efforts, IYILA periodically has a booth at the local Farmer's Market at the La Cienega Plaza shopping center on Thursdays 3-7 p.m. Volunteers are needed. Info: Marta Jasberg, [mjasberg@gmail.com](mailto:mjasberg@gmail.com)

#### IYILA Movie Nights

**Upcoming: March 21, 2009 at 7:00 p.m.** Four nights a year, IYASC hosts movie nights at IYILA. Archival movies are shown, including footage of B.K.S. Iyengar teaching, demonstrating *asanas*, or speaking about yoga. All are welcome to attend; non-members pay a small fee. Info: Andrea Isco, [number17@wgn.net](mailto:number17@wgn.net)