

# Yoga Vancouver

Iyengar Yoga Vancouver Newsletter

JUNE 2002

## Yoga Philosophy

by Ingelise Nherlan

*Ahimsa, satya, asteya, brahmacharya, aparigraha*: these ethical disciplines, or universal commandments, make up *yama*, the first of yoga's eight limbs.

It is hardly a coincidence that *ahimsa* – non-violence – is the very first of Patanjali's *yamas*. We read in the Bible that Jesus would greet people with these words: "Peace be with you." Before any connection/communication can take place on any level, let there be a commitment to non-violence.

So why is there violence? Is violence unique to humankind?

When a tornado rages we call it a "violent" storm. Yet violence is its one and only nature. It is supposed to be violent. It is not evil.

When lions take down a gazelle is it violence? Violent to observe yes, but not an example of violence because the giving of pain is not chosen. Lions kill only when hungry. At other times a herd of gazelles and a family of lions can exist side by side. Many examples can be given. Through the ages humans, although blessed with consciousness and therefore given the ability to make a choice, seem to consistently and systematically take pleasure in *himsa* – violence – for no reason other than a sick pleasure in inflicting physical and emotional pain on others.

Why are some people like that?

Gurujī teaches that violence arises from fear, weakness, ignorance and/or restlessness.

But shouldn't we know better, we who have so much?

"They who want so much are even poorer," says a spiritual proverb. It is

only a matter of time before our future becomes our past – and unless *ahimsa* is first and foremost here and now, quickly it is too late.

What would it take to bring all earthlings to a simple level of living from *ahimsa*?

The answer is to practice yoga. Light is stronger than dark and impurities will burn up like space debris entering the atmosphere. Like a gravitational atmosphere, darkness is too dense to survive with illumination and therefore gradually will dissolve. Practice. Yoga acts like a vacuum cleaner: it sucks up all impurities.

When reason sleeps, demons dance. Is it really too hard to be reasonable with each other and our surroundings? One thing is for sure. There is no excuse for violence – ever. So what's with the human race? What's our excuse? It is a concern.

Thank God for Yoga, wouldn't you say?

*If there is right in the soul there will be beauty in the person.*

*If there is beauty in the person there will be harmony in the home.*

*If there is harmony in the home, there will be order in the nation.*

*If there is order in the nation there will be peace in the world.*

(Author unknown)

Namaste.

*Ingelise Nherlan teaches in West Vancouver.*

*She will be in Pune this summer.*

*You can reach her at [ingelise@shaw.ca](mailto:ingelise@shaw.ca), or at Room For Yoga, 604-926-6985.*

***Your whole being should be symmetrical. Yoga is symmetry. That is why Yoga is a basic art.***

B.K.S. Iyengar

***Allow your intelligence to penetrate evenly throughout the body to its extremities, like rays of sunshine.***

B.K.S. Iyengar



B.K.S. Iyengar  
Yoga Association

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# Workshop report: Ingela Abbott

## The Yoga Space, January 25, 26, 27, 2002

by Eve Johnson

At a certain point, every yoga student learns that yoga is much more than asana. Sooner or later, we want to know about the other seven of yoga's eight limbs and how to incorporate them into our asana practice and our lives.

Ingela Abbott is a senior Iyengar teacher who heads the Yoga Northwest studio in Fair Haven, WA. On the snowiest weekend of Vancouver's winter, she gave 40 students ranging from relative beginners to long-time teachers a workshop that integrated philosophy and asana in an unforced and organic way.

After a discussion of Patanjali's second sutra, usually translated as "yoga is the settling of the mind into silence," we sat, absorbing Ingela's mantra: "trust and let go."

On Saturday, her focus was *ahimsa*, the first of the universal moral commandments. Although it's usually translated as "non-harming," Ingela prefers to state it positively, as kind and loving care.

"Why do we seek alignment in poses?" she asked. "Because alignment is an expression of care. To line up the centre of the heel with the centre of the arch is to bring the attention into the feet. To love something, you must pay attention to it."

"We balance and align the feet and legs to give care to the knees, and we balance and align the pelvis to give care to the lower back."

The rest of the morning was spent in applying *ahimsa* to standing poses. The afternoon brought restorative work, and the frequent repetition of "trust and let go."

Sunday morning, the topic was contentment, one of the *niyamas*, or ethical disciplines, followed by backbends – a part of the practice far removed from contentment for many students.

Ingela discussed the difference between contentment and inertia, saying she likes the definition of contentment as: "To accept what you have, give what you have, enjoy what you have and celebrate each step on the journey."

Arm balance, a pose requiring "50% flexibility and 50% strength" poses a challenge for almost everyone, she said, and taught an arm balance preparation (see box) that offered hope for us all.

After *bhekasana*, which she recommends for people with knee pain, *setu bandhasana*, *eka pada setu bandhasana*, *urdhva dhanurasana*, and *eka pada urdhva dhanurasana* we settled, with contentment, into leg stretches.

*Eve Johnson studies with Gioia Irwin and teaches at The Yoga Space.*



Photo by Gerie

Ingela gives arm-balance pointers.

Ingela credits Felicity Green with passing on this technique for kicking up into arm balance.

- Bring the body into downward dog with the fingertips two inches from a wall.
- Decide which leg is the "pusher" leg and which is the "swinger."
- Look to the thumbs for courage, and to bring strength into the torso.
- On an inhalation, lift the swinger leg, and lengthen through the spine.
- On the exhalation, fling up, with no thought of coming into the pose. (In fact, Ingela forbade anyone to come into the pose.)
- Repeat three times, then rest.
- Next, work with the action of the pusher leg. Hold the swinger up in the air, lengthen through the spine on the inhalation.
- With no help from the swinger leg, push off the ground on the exhalation.
- Repeat three times, then rest.
- Come into downward dog, fling with the swinger and push with the pusher. In time, and with regular practice, you'll find yourself in arm balance.
- When should you work at kicking up with the second leg? Ingela recommends getting comfortable with the easier leg first, then working on the "slow" side.

## Editors Greeting

Since 1976, this newsletter has gone through several incarnations. It began as a single typed sheet and at one point grew to 16 pages with plentiful photographs. Sometimes there's been no newsletter at all.

We're back, hoping to bring you a connection to the Vancouver Iyengar community, including reports from workshops, notice of workshops to come, news items, introductions to your fellow students and insights into everything from yoga philosophy to home practice.

If there's something you'd like to see in these pages, please let us know. If you'd like to share your writing, graphic or photographic skills, please do. You'll be more than welcome.

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# Workshop report: Julie Gudmestad The Cambrian Hall, March 15, 16, 17, 2002.

by Laurie Kelley

Since workshops are a way of life for me, I didn't hesitate to sign on for yet another opportunity when the flyer for Julie Gudmestad, physical therapist and Iyengar certified teacher, came around.

I'd appreciated her "Anatomy of a Yogi" articles in *Yoga Journal*, which are well researched and easy to apply. And I must admit that I find her credentials very alluring!

Julie has been practicing physical therapy for 25 years, specializing in orthopedics, sports injuries, and stress related problems and has taught yoga for 32 years. Classes at Gudmestad Yoga Center in Portland, Ore. integrate the physical therapist's knowledge of anatomy and movement patterns into the yoga poses.

My first impressions of Julie were twinkling eyes, quick intellect and comfortable presence. We moved easily into asana practice Friday night with twisting work, with the intention of lengthening the spine as we moved through *Utthita Trikonasana*, *Prasarita Padottanasana*, *Ardha Chandrasana*, and *Utthita Parsvakonasana*. *Savasana* complemented the work as a "soaking" pose following the squeezing action of twisting.

On Day 2, we learned that strong hamstrings can stabilize the knees and help us avoid SI problems and insertion

point inflammation. Adding hip abductor engagement (see box) and lower abdominal strength, we met the challenges of *Vasisthasana*, *Jathara Parivartanasana*, *Salambha Sirsanasana*, *Malasana*, *Bakasana*, *Bhujapidasana*, and *Tittibhasana*.

Julie's clear, sequential and simple style of teaching made difficult poses seem easy. She encouraged us to "fine tune the body English of the pose" and "use stability to play with movement" as we gained integrity with her linked movements.

Day 3 brought the glorious explosion of backbending. Getting there was half the fun, as we engaged the *latisimus dorsi* to open the thoracic spine. Broadened collarbones were achieved with a simple block placement at the chest. Focusing on lifting the waist off the pelvis in lunges opened our *psosas*. And a thoughtful technique for sun salutation opened the spine. All processes were then brought forward into *Urdhva Dhanurasana*. Our final challenge Sunday afternoon was a thrilling attempt in partner work for *Eka Pada Rajakapotasana*.

Julie opened this workshop with the following quote (author unknown): "Peace does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble, or hard



Photo by Laurie Kelley

Julie adjusts a student in plank pose.

work. It means to be in the midst of those things and still be calm in your heart." I can truly say that I experienced a peace-filled weekend with a teacher of integrity, brilliance, and warmth.

*Laurie Kelley is an Iyengar teacher who recently moved to Vancouver from Nashville. She holds certification from the Southern Institute for Yoga Instructors.*

## Engaging the hip abductors (Gluteus Medius and Gluteus Minimus) in *Ardha Chandrasana*.

Lie on your side with your bottom arm and leg bent. Stretch the top leg out straight, and rest the foot on the tall side of a block.

It helps to lie with your back to a wall (with your head, both shoulders, both hips and the top-leg heel touching the wall) to help keep your body and leg in one straight line.

Lengthen your leg out of your hip, and keeping your foot parallel to the floor, smoothly lift your foot off the block. You only need to lift the leg 6-12 inches: lift any higher and you will compress your side waist. Do several repetitions, or until the muscles start to feel good and tired."

## Workshop News:

**Donald Moyer** is coming to Vancouver. Mark the weekend of October 18 – 20 on your calendar and get ready for one of the most stimulating and exuberant experiences the yoga world has to offer. Donald has been teaching at The Yoga Room in Berkeley, CA, since 1978, shortly after he introduced Maureen Carruthers to the work of a little-known guru in Pune called B.K.S. Iyengar. The rest is history: Maureen traveled to India, studied with Mr. Iyengar and

went on to help found our BKS Iyengar Association and to train many senior teachers.

Donald combines a friendly teaching style with finely detailed anatomical awareness. Two years ago, he drew our attention to sternum, its separate parts, and the way their movement aids or hinders us in asana. The result for one long-time student was "the best shoulder stand I've done in my life."

"Hallelujah!" as Donald would say.

**For more information**, email Susan Bull at [susansusanbull@hotmail.com](mailto:susansusanbull@hotmail.com), or call 604-985-1994.

- Limited financial assistance is available for workshops. Check with your teacher for details.
- Are you willing to billet out-of-town students during workshops? If so, please call Heather Graham, at 604-515-9209, so she can add your name to the list.