

YOGA VIDYA

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Today is a Gift

A Journey of Healing

BY CINDY LEE

Edited by Michael Lee, M.D.

My back pain had returned, and it was excruciating. As a healthcare provider, I understood the potential adverse effects of taking oral analgesics, but I needed to fulfill my daily duties and responsibilities. Painkillers were simply my way of surviving. It had been several years since I experienced such severe back pain, but this time, it wasn't just physical pain. Taking pain medicine was an attempt to numb the pain, both literally and figuratively, so I could get through the day, and a far cry from the pain remedy I had discovered by accident years prior.

In 2006, in search of a remedy for my back pain, I found myself in a room of malodorous fumes and warm bodies as swarms of people manipulated and tugged on "patients" tied in straps, hung them on hooks and ropes on the wall, and straddled them on heavy wooden equipment. This, I was told, was the medical class at the Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga

Institute (RIMYI), though to my inexperienced eyes, it resembled a scene from a 19th-century torture chamber. A stern-looking Indian woman was handing out "prescriptions" to patients, who were then tied up by eager onlookers. It was my first Iyengar Yoga class, recommended by friends during a previous trip to India because I was complaining of back pain at such a young age. Perhaps I can be taken care of and cure my back pain in these medical classes, I naively thought. Obviously, I did not know what I was getting into.

Although I was successful in achieving relief from chronic back pain through the medical classes, it was not the easy cure I had imagined. The stern-looking woman conducting the elaborate and seemingly torturous routines was Geetaji, I later discovered. Looking back, I realize how fortunate I was to be instructed directly by Geetaji and her assistants, despite the fact that I had never heard of the Iyengars. The "prescribed tortures" were very specific sequences of yoga

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Breaking Through

BY CHERE THOMAS

As my long anticipated first trip to Pune approached, a chronic shoulder injury worsened, requiring surgery. I began classes at RIMYI ten weeks after rotator cuff repair surgery and was admitted into the medical classes.

Using a sequence Geetaji prepared for me, Raya Uma Datta oversaw my first medical class. All my poses were modified, prop intense, and required assistance to set up. There were many assistant teachers in the class willing and able to help.

After the invocation during my second medical class, I retrieved my sequence from the notebook and began my practice. Before I knew it, Guruji came over and moved me to the grille, which is like a security window you see on homes to keep intruders out.

Guruji instructed me to take my arm through the grille for *Utthita Hasta Padasana*. I sensed he was becoming frustrated with me as I attempted to get my arm all the way up to my newly repaired shoulder through a hole slightly bigger than my deltoid, not an easy task. I must have shown fear, which caused Guruji to mumble something to his assistants as he turned and walked away from me. Of course, my immediate reaction was to start crying.

A little while later, Guruji returned, giving me directions to do various standing poses with my back to the grille, arm through the grille (all the way up to the shoulder socket), extending, revolving, taking the shoulder blade in and extending more, demanding more and more out of me, breaking through my fear to gain mobility and strength.

Guruji had either Raya or his granddaughter, Abhijata, do the pose I was to

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CINDY LEE COLLECTION

Cindy Lee practicing modified Viparita Karani, RIMYI medical class, Pune, India 2014.

A Holistic Approach, *Cont. from page 3*
ing with my injury and what I can do” in class, at home, and while traveling.

“I went to an Iyengar Yoga class in Florida recently, and I told the teacher, ‘I have these issues, and this is what I do to take care of them.’ Then I went ahead and did my very specific modifications.” Deanna added that attending therapy has made her even more mindful. “Injuries educate us. I have to be more aware every day to see what my next stage is,” she said.

“I can’t speak highly enough of a therapy class,” said Sharon Sava, a long-time practitioner and a therapy student of Gloria’s. Sharon values these classes for their focus on each individual. She credits them with changing the way she practices. “If it wasn’t for yoga, I don’t think I would be walking right now.”

On a recent Wednesday afternoon, therapy class at the Iyengar Yoga Institute of La Mesa resembled a Pune medical class in miniature. Five teachers paired up with individual students to guide their awareness in the poses, arrange complex prop set-ups, and assist with movements – all under the watchful eye of Gloria, who circulated and offered corrections, just as the Iyengars do in Pune.

“It’s important to remember that what you learn in therapy must be carried with you over the long term,” Gloria explained.

“Once you have a weak area, it will never be as if it were brand new. And you have to take care of it. So even if you go to yoga therapy and later think that everything is back to normal, you have to do maintenance. You have to practice. If you don’t do what has been recommended for you to do therapeutically on a regular basis – it doesn’t have to be every day, or even every week, but at least on a monthly basis – there is always the potential to have those problems again.”

“It’s part of a lifetime of learning about yourself. And the thing is, nobody knows whether you are taking care of yourself but you. You have to be honest with yourself about it,” Gloria said. “Yoga therapy works, but only if you do it.” ■

Kimberly Zanger Mackesy is an Introductory II Iyengar Yoga teacher. She teaches throughout San Diego County.

¹ *Yoga Rahasya*: Compilation of articles on Yoga Therapy (1994 to 2009), p. 25.

² *Ibid.* pp. 9-12.

Iyengar Yoga Therapeutics (IYT)

BY CHRISTIE HALL

Iyengar Yoga has long been an ideal vehicle for therapeutic applications and scientific study. In 2007, it became clear that getting grants to fund research required a formal organization, and the idea for Iyengar Yoga Therapeutics (IYT) was born.

By 2011, a group of Los Angeles-based Iyengar Yoga teachers and advocates had launched Iyengar Yoga Therapeutics to train teachers in specific therapeutic applications, to provide therapeutic classes to the communities in need, and to take part in scientific research.

Manouso Manos will take up the duties of giving specific guidance in therapeutic applications with a three-year comprehensive teacher-training program beginning the first quarter of 2015. (*see p. 11*).

Previously, this training occurred through six sessions taught by Stephanie Quirk (*see p. 6-7*) from 2011 through April 2014. Teachers at Intermediate Junior I and higher were eligible to take all four days of each session and received a certificate of completion. Anatomy workshops by Laura Antelmi-Allard preceded each session and were open to students and teachers of all levels.

Past public therapeutic classes include:

- Yoga for Persistent Fatigue sought to teach practices that help with sleep and with finding peace of mind in challenging times. The teacher, Beth Sternlieb, has published research on breast cancer survivors with persistent fatigue.
- Eric Small, who was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis more than 50 years ago, taught about adaptations of Iyengar Yoga for those with neurological conditions.
- Breast cancer survivor Denise Thibault taught from the personal guidance she received from B.K.S. and Geeta Iyengar in her workshop on healing and healthy movement after surgery.
- “IYT Reaches Out”: Garth McLean taught “Yoga for Kids with High-

Functioning Autism” in August 2012 in Alhambra.

Future plans include structuring classes for identified groups, including seniors, at risk teens and children. In the area of furthering research, IYT directors have been in conversations with USC.

The first realization that an organization such as IYT was needed came as Marla Apt and Arlene Zeichner were seeking funding for grant-supported research on irritable bowel syndrome at UCLA, according to Zeichner. Over the next few months, they began recruiting teachers ranked Intermediate Junior III and up and began forming a board of directors and an advisory board. By late 2008, Iyengar Yoga Therapeutics was formally incorporated.

The IYT board of directors includes teachers who have taken part in research, Beth Sternlieb, a staff member of the Pediatric Pain program at UCLA and a co-author of multiple yoga studies, and Amanda White, who has taken part in UCLA-based research using Iyengar Yoga. Other teachers on the board include Eric Small, a leading teacher of students with neurological conditions, Lisa Walford, who has taught therapeutic classes at the Iyengar Yoga Institute of Los Angeles (IYILA), and her co-teacher of these classes, Marla Apt, who created the first yoga therapy curriculum at UCLA’s medical school. Other certified teachers on the board are Gloria Goldberg, founder, director and co-curriculum coordinator of the teacher training program for Southern California (formerly IYASC), Diane Gysbers, faculty for the teacher training program, and Garth McLean, who assists in medical classes in Pune. Other board members are Zeichner, a digital media consultant, and Michael Siebert, a financial planner. ■

Info: www.iyengaryogatherapeutics.com

Christie Hall, a long-time student of Iyengar Yoga, assisted in setting up IYT’s website and helps copy edit for Yoga Vidya.

Stories from IYILA Therapeutics Classes

BY IDA UNGER

In 2011, therapeutic yoga sessions began at the Iyengar Yoga Institute of Los Angeles (IYILA). Senior teachers Lisa Walford and Marla Apt interview students, design specific therapeutic sequences, and orchestrate these sessions with help from assistants. (see p.10). New students commit to an 8-week series, followed by one or more optional 4-week series to support integration of the therapeutic applications with their regular classes and home practice. — Ed.

● **Daniel** is a new participant in the IYILA therapeutics class. A father and husband in his 50s, he was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease 18 years ago and is on medication. He had never tried yoga, but heard that the therapeutics class could possibly give him relief. His sequence involves weighing down his body in various postures to calm the nerves. He says, "It was clear things were happening, but I didn't have to break a sweat. The postures were extremely comfortable and made me feel relaxed. I had a general sense of well being after each session, and that alone is very useful."

● **Benjamin**, a young man who worked as a painting contractor, was hurt and diagnosed with transverse myelitis, a spinal cord injury. He was seen walking with a cane on one of his jobs, when another student, a woman who had benefited from therapeutics for her multiple sclerosis, suggested the class to him. His poses involve connecting his injured side to his good side to increase balance, and opening up the knee joint to improve his walking. "It has helped me learn how to treat and deal with pain. I have learned how to relax my joints and muscles." He particularly enjoys *Bhikasana*, frog pose. It has been beneficial for him to be in an uplifting environment: "A helpful and hopping environment" that has brought a positive impact on his life. His young son now attends the children's class at IYILA.

● **Says one student**, "I arrive to class feeling stressed and leave feeling calm, arrive scattered and leave centered, arrive feeling dis-ease and leave knowing I can handle what life brings my way with dignity, calm and resolve to live well each day, practice by practice, pose by pose, and breath by breath." ■

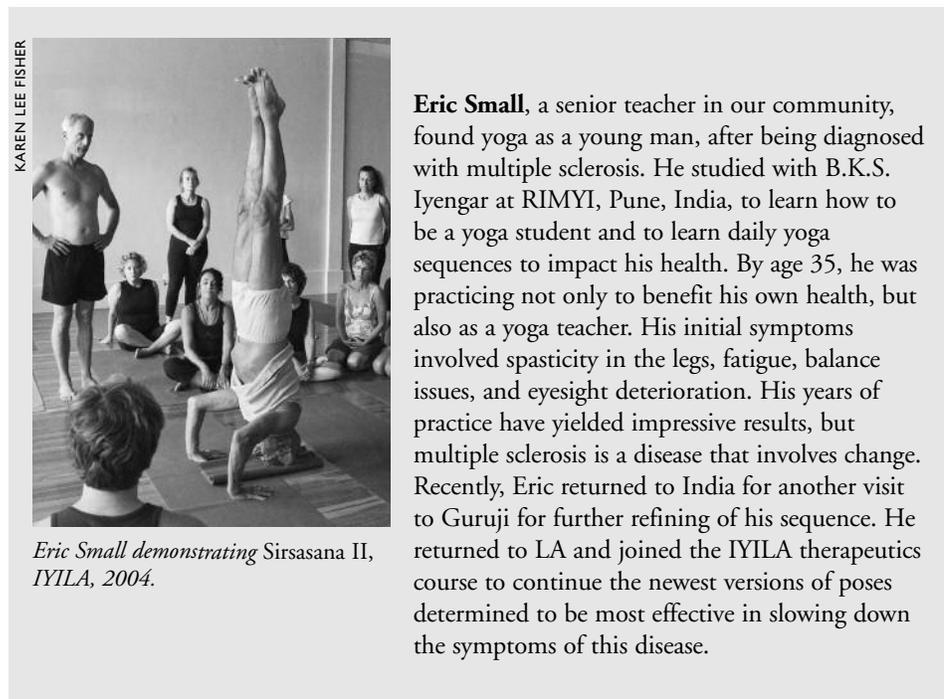
A Journey of Healing, *Cont. from page 1*
postures that Geetaji carefully and personally assigned and administered for each diagnosis. She was a keen observer who understood the *asanas* from the inside. She helped me to learn modifications of specific *asanas* to treat my scoliosis, the abnormal curvature of my spine causing back pain. As a result of my self-practice and feedback from Geetaji and the assistants, I began to experience relief from my back pain. I returned to Pune the following year for two months before coming back to the United States, where I vowed to continue my yoga practice.

Initially, when I returned to Los Angeles, I kept my self-practice strong, which kept my back pain abated. After graduate school, I worked in a hospital as an occupational therapist, transferring heavily dependent patients daily from bed to wheelchair. Work was taking its toll on my back, but yoga was my lifeline. If I missed practice, I would experience back pain. My pain would ease whenever I practiced the *asanas* therapeutically using my modifications. Despite knowing that yoga helped me, I struggled to keep up the practice as I encountered an unexpected stumbling block in my life.

In 2012, I faced a major obstacle when my father was diagnosed with terminal cancer. He required 24-hour care, as his last wish was to die at home. My family and I took shifts to take care of him. I rearranged my work schedule and reduced my hours to move in with my parents for most of the week to assist with the caregiving. After a long day of work as a therapist, I would come home to care for my father. As time progressed and the demands of being a caregiver mounted, my yoga practice began to dwindle. My self-practice was mechanical and my progress stagnated. Eventually, I stopped self-practice completely as I chose to spend the hour with my dad rather than practice yoga, because I didn't know how much longer I had with him.

Stopping my yoga practice had its consequences. I was thrown off balance in many ways. My back pain became severe. I was unhappy and bitter at the injustice of the situation. I was resentful that I was losing time in my youth, burdened with the responsibility of taking care of my

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Eric Small demonstrating Sirsasana II, IYILA, 2004.

Eric Small, a senior teacher in our community, found yoga as a young man, after being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. He studied with B.K.S. Iyengar at RIMYI, Pune, India, to learn how to be a yoga student and to learn daily yoga sequences to impact his health. By age 35, he was practicing not only to benefit his own health, but also as a yoga teacher. His initial symptoms involved spasticity in the legs, fatigue, balance issues, and eyesight deterioration. His years of practice have yielded impressive results, but multiple sclerosis is a disease that involves change. Recently, Eric returned to India for another visit to Gurujī for further refining of his sequence. He returned to LA and joined the IYILA therapeutics course to continue the newest versions of poses determined to be most effective in slowing down the symptoms of this disease.

Ida Unger, a certified Iyengar Yoga Teacher, lives in Tujunga, California. She teaches at IYILA and throughout greater LA. She also teaches yoga to women in correction facilities in California.



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YOGA VIDYA

- “Yoga teaches to cure what need not be endured and endure what cannot be cured.” – B.K.S. Iyengar

Iyengar Yoga Therapy in Southern California

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MATTHEW LURIE/IYENGAR YOGA THERAPY COLLECTION

Iyengar Yoga teachers at the last workshop of IYT's inaugural 3-year course, taught by Stephanie Quirk: bottom row (L to R) Linda Nishio, Lisa Walford, Jennifer Edwards; Ida Unger; middle row (L to R) Aida Amirkhanian, Lori McIntosh, Aretha McKinney, Keri Lee, Marla Apt, JoAnne Redoble; top row (L to R) Diane Gysbers, Laura Antelmi, Stephanie Quirk, Brian Hogencamp, Peg Cleve, Dr. Manju Vachber. Missing: Allen Mulch, Koren Paalman, Suzanne Simon.

Y.S. II.16

beyam duḥkham anāgatam

The pains which are yet to come can be and are to be avoided.