

**IYANW Officers:**

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## A Note from the President: Service to Community

**Tonya Garreud**

While practicing at home, the pursuit of yoga can seem a solitary one. I study from books, notes from classes in Pune, and my own memory of instructions from workshops. My *Asana* and *Pranayama* practices ultimately take me on an inward journey. But my experience this past year has shown me that yoga is not a solitary endeavor.

In this past year leading up to the convention in Portland, Oregon, the number of people helping to make the convention a successful and memorable event grew far beyond the original steering committee made up of Julie Lawrence and Gloria Goldberg, Event Co-Chairs; Nina Pileggi, Finance Chair; and myself, Venue Coordinator. It grew to include invaluable assistance from far and wide. Most impressive were the hundreds of volunteers—many of them local students who could not actually attend the convention classes—willing to donate time and effort to make the event run seamlessly.

I've been amazed by the willingness of the volunteers to participate in any way they could. This is also part of yoga practice: helping others, being of service, and building community.

One way we help each other is by sharing our stories. As the articles in this issue show, yoga touches each of us in very unique ways—Kati Johnson shares how yoga has been helpful in overcoming depression, Kisa Davison uses her practice to lessen back pain brought on by scoliosis. We all have in common what Felicity Green talks about in her discussion of therapeutic yoga: the desire to know ourselves better. When we learn about ourselves through our practice, we can give ourselves the props, the sequences, and the space that we need.

As members of both IYNAUS and its regional organization IYANW, we can be of service by participating in the elections for board members. IYANW is currently seeking nominees for the upcoming election (see article on page 10). Be of service by voting, or get involved by volunteering to serve a four-year term on the NW board.

In addition to preparing for the election this summer, the IYANW board is also selecting dates and locations for member-only workshops to be held this fall. Certified teachers willing to offer a workshop for IYANW members can contact me for specifics. By offering these workshops, we are hoping to create more interest in the regional organization. It's clear from the number of convention volunteers that students are interested in participating in the larger Iyengar Yoga community, and these workshops, offered throughout the region, will help keep this surge of interest going.

I hope to see you at one of our upcoming events—a member-only workshop, or maybe at the winter board meeting if you choose to run for election, or at one of the many workshops offered around the region this fall. As always, I encourage you to let us know how we can best support you. Your ideas and suggestions are greatly appreciated. ■

All the best,



### Coming Next Issue: How we talk when we talk about yoga.

*The language of Iyengar Yoga is very precise, but it is also rich with analogies, metaphors, and even poetry. Send us stories about how creative language has inspired you, or, if you're a teacher, how you use language to deepen your students' awareness. Also send workshop information, community news, recommended resources, and pictures to Denise Weeks at [denise.weeks@comcast.net](mailto:denise.weeks@comcast.net). Deadline is October 1.*

## Upcoming Workshops

Area studios are encouraged to send announcements of upcoming workshops being offered by Certified Iyengar Yoga Instructors.

### **Buckhorn Springs Yoga Retreat**

**Julie Lawrence**

July 18 – 23

[jlyc.com](http://jlyc.com)

503.227.5524

### **Anatomy Awareness in Asana**

August 9 – 13

Gudmestad Yoga Studio, Portland OR

[gudmestadyoga.com](http://gudmestadyoga.com)

503.223.8157

### **Gabriella Giubilaro**

September 10 – 12

Julie Lawrence Yoga Center, Portland OR

[jlyc.com](http://jlyc.com)

503.227.5524

### **Julie Gudmestad**

#### **Anatomy and Asana for the Hip, Pelvis and Lower Back**

September 17 – 19

The Boise Yoga Center, Boise ID

[boiseyogacenter.com](http://boiseyogacenter.com)

208.343.9786

*Continued on back page*

# Therapeutic Yoga—An Interview with Felicity Green

by Denise Weeks

In honor of the recent Iyengar Yoga Teacher's convention and this newsletter's theme, yoga and healing, I asked Felicity Green, recipient of this year's "Lighting the Way" award, to talk about her work in therapeutic yoga. We met at her sunny Lopez Island home in March. What follows are highlights of our hour-long conversation on yoga as therapy, the ethical aspects of teaching yoga, and the key to what makes Iyengar Yoga so healing.

**How did you get interested in teaching "therapeutic" yoga? Did you call it that?**

I feel all Iyengar is therapeutic. I call it "therapeutic yoga" when there is a major or longstanding physical difficulty. My approach is to teach a few poses with modifications that they are to practice daily. They have to take responsibility, which is to say, develop discipline.

**So you're always folding the therapeutic aspects into a regular yoga practice. You're not seeing it as separate work.**

Right. I don't see it as separate. Even getting somebody to stand in *Tadasana* and put their feet straight—they suddenly realize that they usually stand with their feet like that [splayed apart]—is a therapeutic action. Because this brings balance into the knees and hips and everything. With Iyengar Yoga, it's the precision that's therapeutic. And we teach that precision right from the beginning.

**How do you look at bodies when you teach yoga or do one-on-one sessions? Do you have a set strategy?**

I look carefully at the students in all four directions, at the way they stand in relation to the vertical line of gravity and the horizontal aspects, as well. This comes from my association with Ida Rolf. My husband was a Rolfer and trained with Ida Rolf, and Ida Rolf had her expertise in *Tadasana*. That was the pose she basically worked with and taught people to look at to see exactly how you were in response to gravity, which is the most important physical force that you have to live with all of your life.

By looking at the student—and again, if I'm working with them individually, talking to them and finding out the history of their body—I can see what areas need work and which poses would help them, and I'm able to modify the pose if necessary. Then looking at them, also, as they do poses, to see the imbalance that comes through in movement. Even if they know how to stand well in *Tadasana*, when they start moving, often, there's an imbalance that shows up. It comes back to the precision of Iyengar Yoga as the healing thing.

**I see a Rolfer, and he takes issue with what he calls our prescriptive method. If we give the instruction, "tail bone in, shoulders back," he**

**says that if you have a class of 18 people, maybe five don't need that instruction.**

I quite agree with that.

**How do we give these basic instructions to beginners?**

I'm thinking of *Tadasana*. If you use the wall, and get people to stand with their heels a few inches from the wall, and ask them to put a hand in here [low back], people who have a big lordosis will be able to slide a whole arm in there. They're the people who need to flatten out their back and take their tailbone in.

We all have different bodies. There isn't a prescription that applies to everybody. Everybody has to have their own individual prescription, but that's what life is. Life is finding your own individual prescription for everything, really.

**When did you start doing the one-on-one work?**

Maybe 1985. When I moved to Seattle, I had a small individual studio, and that's when I started doing one-on-one.

**Were you the first person doing that work in the Iyengar tradition—besides Mr. Iyengar?**

That I do not know. I've always remembered what Mr. Iyengar said, which is: "Don't do one-on-one if there's no problem." Because then it's just people who have enough money to indulge themselves to have all your individual attention. I've always stuck with that. I have never done individuals with people who didn't have a problem. There's always been a limit to how long I'll work with somebody, and then they need to go to a class. They've learned enough about their body to go to a class and keep themselves out of trouble by not obeying some instructions, by not tucking their tailbone if they don't need to tuck their tailbone.

There are a lot of teachers doing individuals because they can make more money that way. It's not just indulgent for the student; it's teaching unethically. Again, Mr. Iyengar said, "We all need to make money when we teach, but we don't teach to make money."

**That's a challenge.**

It is, particularly in this society. But I think it's a very important ethical thing because otherwise if you start teaching to make money, then you want to be popular with your students, and you may not be honest with them or straightforward. I've always seen Mr. Iyengar being a totally straight arrow. He will tell you how it is, what it is, whether you're going to like it or not. I think yoga is an ethical discipline, and if you're going to teach yoga, you've got to abide by the ethics. Ethics should be involved in everything you do.



Steven Horn, stevehorn.net

***Related to ethics, what do yoga teachers owe their students—in terms of understanding students' particular injuries and imbalances? To be certified, we have to know some basic anatomy. Should yoga teachers have a stronger background in that area?***

With our levels of certification and our syllabi, I think teachers can get enough. They can get a smattering of anatomical knowledge and philosophy. But I think a teacher who is really sincere will follow that up with a much deeper study that they initiate themselves. But people are different. There are teachers who are good teachers who are not really interested in the philosophical aspects, they're interested in the more physical aspects.

**Mr. Iyengar many years ago said yoga is like a tree, and it has many leaves and many fruits. And some of the fruits will reach ripeness and some of the fruits will drop off the tree before they're ripe.**

Mr. Iyengar many years ago said yoga is like a tree, and it has many leaves and many fruits. And some of the fruits will reach ripeness and some of the fruits will drop off the tree before they're ripe. And I think yoga teachers are like that. Some are going to be really devoted and serious about it and will continue. Just look at your students. You start a beginning level class and you have 15 sign ups. Four years later, how many will still come? Yoga is not for everybody.

***When you talk about the long term commitment that only a small number of students will make, that makes me think about how healing yoga can be, but also how you can get hurt doing yoga. I feel a little torn about that when talking to new students, especially, who obviously only come for the benefits.***

The benefits of yoga will only come if what's paid attention to is *how* you practice, not what you practice. We have to practice with awareness, as we learn about our bodies, our strengths and our weaknesses. We have to take this into consideration as we practice. It all depends on how the asana is done. In the different groups of poses—for instance, inversions—there's an area where the power is the strongest. *Sirsasana* and *Sarvangasana* are both the poses that will heal a bad neck, but if they're done incorrectly, will ruin a good neck.

Teachers have to be very observational and be able to adjust students easily, but if there's a really serious problem where the student is not understanding, not getting the point, and continues to hurt themselves, then that's the time to suggest some therapeutic sessions. When you're teaching class and you have 20 people in the class, you can't spend a whole lot of time with one person. It's not fair to other students. But I do understand why there's meant to be a limit on who does therapeutic work. I think it should be worded a little differently, because I think it's therapeutic right from the word go. Maybe individual therapeutic work should be limited. Beginning level teachers are not ready. They've not developed the ability to observe and diagnose what the problem is. They need more experience.

***This reminds me of the challenge inherent in Kriya Yoga: to bring Tapas and Svadhyaya together. To know yourself deeply, including knowing your physical injuries, weaknesses, and limitations, but to pursue this practice with discipline, intensity, and zeal. How do we find the right balance?***

You're there to encourage your students to have discipline. Commitment. You're helping to teach them to learn discipline, because we need discipline to practice. Mr Iyengar often says, "Are you practicing yoga or are you practicing *bhoga*?" *Bhoga* is pleasure. Yes, there should be a certain amount of pleasure in it, but there should also be a certain amount of *tapas* in it, which is burning zeal.

You have to give up something to be able to practice. So that also comes into *tapas*, to give up something. To be able to do something, you realize that yoga is more important in some ways for you than lying in bed for that extra hour, so you give it up. It's a sacrifice. We make certain sacrifices to practice yoga seriously.

***When we say, you need to go home and practice this, are we assuming that they see the value in it already, or are we trying to convince them that there's a richness they won't even believe possible, that they just have to go home and do it?***

I tell beginning students, two poses. Do these two poses for a week, it'll take you five minutes. But after they've done those two poses for a week, they're beginning to understand their body in those two poses because they're not getting instruction, they're having to think about what they're doing, and they may be more alert to feeling what they're feeling, which is the important thing.

You have to get it to students right from the beginning, as much as you can, that it's up to them. You can give them the tools, you can give them the instruction, but if they don't use the tools nothing much is going to happen, or it's going to happen very slowly.

I talk about it like money in the bank. When you have excess money, if you're wise, you save it. When you have a need for that extra money, or a little cushion, you have your money in there. If you're unwise, you don't save it, and then when you need your money because there's something going wrong with your body, you don't have it. All of us know if we've been doing yoga and something happens, usually we get better from it much quicker than we did before. So every time you practice, you're putting money in the bank.

***I had a medical procedure recently and was prescribed a lot of pain medication, and I was told to stay on top of the pain. I did take some of the meds, but I also started doing restoratives as soon as I could. When I took the medication, it felt like a very intellectual process. I was thinking, Does it hurt now? Am I staying ahead of it? Whereas with yoga, I was just trying to feel whatever I could feel, and if it was pain, just breathing into it. The pain didn't necessarily go away, but it was different.***

Our society has such a fear of pain. If you have any, quickly take an Aspirin, or a Tylenol, or an Advil, or something. We all have different

tolerances to pain. Some of us can tolerate quite a lot of pain; some people cannot. But our society teaches us not to tolerate pain, that we shouldn't have to tolerate pain. Pain and pleasure are a part of life. We can maybe avoid physical pain by taking these pills, but we can't avoid emotional pain; we can't avoid psychological pain. We live in a society that creates all these fears for us. Like fear of death. We try to save every body from death. Save the babies, save the old people. Make them live to 98, even if they have a terrible quality of life. At least they're not dead!

But in yoga, we learn to feel in our body. We feel to connect to it. You can't connect to your body intellectually. You can only connect to your body in feeling. And I think that's another thing that yoga does. That's what yoga means, is to bring your body and your intellect, in a sense, together. Instead of them being two separate things.

***We've been talking mostly about the physical. Do you ever find that the yoga philosophy helps you in your therapeutic work?***

The body is not separate from the emotional or intellectual aspects of the person. When I see people one-on-one it's a much more intimate relationship. We can talk about all sorts of things that I could never talk to somebody about in class. Back pain, for instance. Or a pain in the neck. We even have expressions, you're a pain in the ass, you're a pain in the neck. Often those have as much psychological reasons for them as they have physical reasons for them. Because people hold things in different areas.

People always have tight shoulders. What's going on with that? Are they too responsible, thinking about what they should do? The emotional aspect has to come into it at a certain stage, and again, unfortunately, in classes, because it's in a class, that aspect is left out, and has to be left out, because you can't suddenly say to somebody in the middle of a class, what's going on at home? [Laughter.]

***Do you have a favorite pose or practice?***

In the last *Yoga Rahashya* there's an article by Mr. Iyengar's granddaughter. Evidently he worked with her one day and she was in the studio practicing the next day, and he came and watched her, and he asked her, why are you doing it like that? She said, "Guruji, I'm doing it like you showed me yesterday." He said, "But that's not right." And she said she was very puzzled. He walked away and he said, "Habit is a disease." She had to think about it. Mr. Iyengar says, "Practice the pose freshly every day as if you have never done it before." Every day your body is a little bit different. Yes, he taught her yesterday to do it this way, but today it is not necessarily right for her to do it this way.

Your *asana* should be fresh each time you do them. If you're observant, it changes. Habits, even habits of practicing poses, are wrong. You've got to change it, you've got to explore.

***How do beginning students know how to explore?***

They don't know. Teachers must also learn to take a different approach. They mustn't teach *Tadasana* the same way every class. One day they're

teaching it to teach about the knees; one time they're teaching it to teach about the feet; one time they're teaching it to show not just the positioning of the feet, but where the balancing point in the feet is. There are many ways to teach a pose. You have to change your emphasis to not become mechanical in your teaching or in your practice.

***Sometimes I wonder about when I may have strayed. For example, maybe I practice coming into or out of a pose in a certain way, and I realize that I've never been taught that, but it seems right to me. So then am I starting to do bhoga instead of Iyengar yoga?***

Mr. Iyengar said, one of the first times I went to India, I don't remember which time—he took *Light on Yoga* and said, "In the beginning, this is

You are not going to be exactly the same as the teacher, so not all information the teacher gives you is correct for you. You have to learn to sort and sift what is right for you.

your Bible. And after a while, after a time, you become your own Bible."

***In answer to "do you have a particular practice?"***

When I went through the menopause there was very little information about yoga, how yoga would help. So I found myself softening my practice, doing many forward bends, and discovering and avoiding poses that created hot flashes and exhaustion. Now my practice is composed mostly of supportive poses and keeping my body flexible, and challenging my loss of stamina without, again, exhausting myself. So through the years my practice has changed. A lot.

I used to go to India once every two or three years. I used to go and gather what I really needed to work on and come back and work on that. And when I thought I understood it, I'd go back again. It wasn't a habit to go every year, just to go.

And this is why your own practice is so important, because it makes you be an authority on yourself. If you're in a class the teacher is the authority. If the teacher says do this, you do this. If the teacher says do that, you do that. But when you practice on your own, you have to question yourself. Well, this doesn't feel quite right. How do I change it? You have all these understandings that come to you in your own practice that never come to you or seldom come to you in a class. Occasionally a teacher has some good suggestion and you try it and you say, oh this feels great, this is good for me. But sometimes they do something and you say, this does not feel good at all.

A teacher is like a mother bird and students are like a baby bird. They just open their mouth. And the teacher feeds in what information that she has. Okay. But then her job is finished. Then, as the baby bird, you have to chew the food, you have to swallow the food, you have to digest the food, you have to keep what's good for you in the food, and you have to get rid of what isn't good for you. Yoga's exactly the same. You are

not going to be exactly the same as the teacher, so not all information the teacher gives you is correct for you. You have to learn to sort and sift what is right for you.

I've never felt Mr. Iyengar was trying to turn out cookie cutter teachers. If you go to senior teachers you realize they're not cookie cutter teachers. They all teach quite differently, and yet the essence is there. But you are as important as the teacher to sort out what's right for you and what isn't right for you.

***After all these years of doing yoga, just last week or so, I started enjoying doing supported Sarvangasana on the chair. And for years I haven't taught it because I didn't like it. It hurt my back. And suddenly, I think it's great. I think it's so interesting to see that evolution.***

Oh yes. The poses that you disliked awfully, when you really work with them, and you've broken through, they become your favorite poses. This is something Swami Radha said—and of course she was talking more from the emotional psychological aspect—but she said, any problem you have as a teacher, consider it as a blessing. Because if you learn

how to deal with that problem, you will really be able to be empathetic with somebody who comes to you with that problem. If you have never been through a divorce, you have no idea what it's like to go through a divorce. Or if you've never had a backache, you've no idea what it's like to have a bad back. You know, so you have to consider those things as blessings. If you work through them, you learn to be empathetic, but also how to help somebody with the same problem.

***Can you give a few words of advice to teachers who want to better help their students?***

Remember that practice is more important than teaching. Your teaching stays fresh and rewarding if it is information that comes from your experience, and not from your intellect. *Kriya* yoga, discipline, interest, zeal and devotion are the main columns that we build on. Then your teaching will be clear and inspiring and ethical. ■

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*Denise Weeks lives and teaches in Bellingham, WA. She is certified at the Introductory level. Anne Geil, who generously helped edit the interview, is also certified at the Introductory level and lives and teaches in Shoreline, WA.*

## On Holes and Healing in India... Excerpts from a Trip to Pune



by Paul Cheek

Monday, 18 January 2010

My trip to the Karla caves, Bhaja caves and the Lohagad Fort was incredible. Angali, my host, gave me some sage advice as I left the house at 6 am for my day's adventure. She said, "Don't eat any sweets given to you by Saduhs because they sometimes drug you and take your money. Just take the sweets, do Namaskar, and toss the sweets out later. Do not look any Saduhs

in the eye for very long because they can hypnotize you and steal your belongings. Take the train back by 6 pm." Points well taken. It was the advice that her son had given me a few weeks ago that I should have heeded.

I thought I was taking the local train from Pune to Malavli but about 45 minutes into the trip the train stopped at Talegaon. I was the only one who stayed on the train and this kind sir asked me where I was going. I told him Malavli and he said I had to get off because the train was going back to Pune. He told me in an hour and fifteen minutes there would be a train to Malavli. Good to know. I walked into the village and had some tea. This was the first time I encountered a woman Chaiwalla and I saw women drinking tea. I ordered some chai and stood around sipping my tea. I think I was in the wrong place. It appeared as if the tea drinking was gender segregated because right next door there were a bunch of men drinking tea. Again, leave it to the clueless westerner to not follow the customs.

I met another young man who was going to Malavli and to the little village of Bhaja and he said he would guide me there. I rode with him on the train and he led me towards the Bhaja caves. He turned to go to his sisters and pointed me in the direction I needed to go. There is freedom in not knowing where you are and having no clue what is around the next corner. I had to pinch myself again reminding myself that I was in India way out in the countryside.

I continued to walk and was taking in all of the sites. I was watching a group of men laugh and converse on the deck of a pretty luxurious house and was looking at some construction that was going on. A rick came barreling around the corner heading right for me even though I was on the side of the road. I stepped back a little bit and ended up falling into a four foot hole. One of the passengers in the rick looked horrified as I climbed out. Kedar, Anjali's son, has warned me to always look down to make sure I did not fall into a hole. I found my hole. A severely bruised left thigh, a sprained left wrist and a sprained right ankle were the result. I gathered myself for a minute and decided to forge on. I figured I could take it slow and since there were no broken bones I felt it would be better to move than let things atrophy.

I got to the steps to the Bhaja caves and asked this young man if I was on the right path. He confirmed that I was. I asked him where he was going and he pointed to a tall ridge across the valley and said it was the Lohagad fort. I asked if I could go with him and he welcomed me.



I was blessed tens times over by meeting Srinath Gopakumar. He is a 26 year old, masters in biology and general physical sciences, a snake expert, and a seasoned trekker. He often leads others on hikes and was checking out the hike for a trek he is leading next weekend. His last job would be my son's dream job – quality control for Kingfisher beer. He said he had to go through about 5 beers a day as part of his job! We had the best time talking and hiking. All of his formal education was in English so his English was good and very formal. He told me of his plans to pursue a PhD in Germany and of the application process. He shared with me his interest in snakes and told me of the many he had personally handled. Personally, I think he should pursue a PhD. in snakes.

We made it to the top and walked around taking pictures and discussing the layout of the fort and how it might have been used. It was an amazing feat of construction and architecture. They had catchments areas for water and other interesting features. As we walked up the mountain he was hoping to see some snakes and maybe handle one. After we were at the top he said that today would not be the day for snakes because now it was too hot. We walked another fifty feet and I heard "Snake!" Turns out the day was a day for snakes. Srinath caught the snake and everyone gathered around him to view it. The snake bit him and everyone was aghast. He knew that the snake was harmless and he has taken it upon himself to help his fellow Indian's overcome their fear of snakes. He said that when most Indians see a snake their first reaction is to want to kill it. He handled the snake for a while and then released it. It was a bronze backed tree snake. Srinath kept saying perfect day, perfect day.

Our next destination was the Bhaja caves. A short twenty minute walk up the hillside brought us to the caves. What an amazing piece of work. The caves were built in the 2nd – 1st century AD. It is hard to imagine how the work was done without our modern tools. The carvings are amazing. There were rooms all around the prayer hall. I called it the Buddhist hotel. There were water catchments areas that consisted of dug out caves that collected the dew. Nice work.

As per Anjali's instructions we caught the train before 6 pm. On the train ride out, there were hardly any people. On the trip back, the train was overflowing with people hanging out the sides. . . .

We made it to Pune and Srinath gave me ride on his scooter back to my flat. It was perfect because it is about a two mile walk from the train to my place and my injuries were bothering me.

Nana had called while I on the train and I called him from the station and told him about my injuries. Once back to my flat I called Heather and asked if she could get me some arnica for my injuries and some food. She jumped on it and helped me out. Nana also showed up and brought some Auyurvedic cream to put on my bruises. Anjali was also doing everything she could do to help me. I am blessed to have people to care for me while in India.

I had to miss class and practice today and it will likely be Thursday before I get back to it. I'll practice on my own until then. The hardest part is getting up and down and putting my pants on. As Heather said, "Welcome to India Paul!"

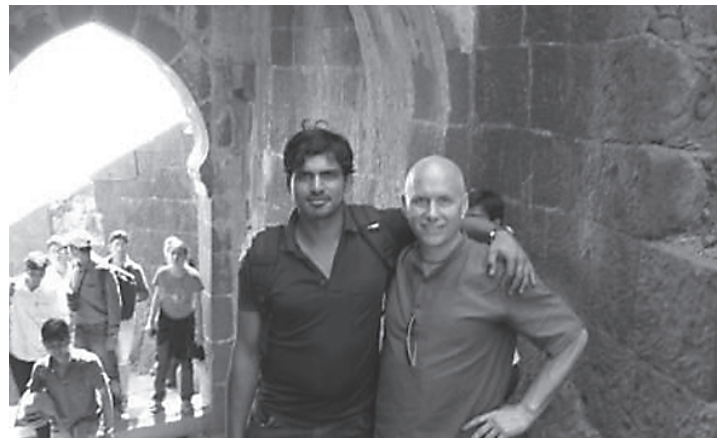
## Tuesday, 19 January 2010

Rolling out of bed is hard too when your whole left side has been mashed. Things are better today. The postures that would cause me extreme grief are *Malasana* and *Virasana* – ouch to even think of them. In light of the hitches in my get-along I am moving better today. Tomorrow I will start to practice again. I am pretty sure I can do *Adho Mukha Svanasana* and *Salamba Sirsasana* because my wrists feel better.

The man in green worked me over today. Bhybu is the guy you want when it comes to Auyurvedic massage. I was scheduled for three sessions of Chavetty Uzhicull this week but due to my injuries we changed the focus to Uzhicull, full body massage with hot oils and Ela and Podi Kizhi which involves boluses filled with herbal leaves and/or powders and hot oil. The Kizhi helps with sprains and other muscle problems. It was amazing. After the full body treatment Bhybu heats the boluses up in a little wok with the oil and then dabs it on the tender spots and squeezes out the herbs onto my body and rubs it in. I felt better instantly. Bhybu is a master at understanding how much to do and when and where. Sounds like what we need to do in our Yoga practice. Two more of these and I'll be ready for something foolish again.

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*Paul Cheek is certified at the Intermediate Junior I level and directs Rushing Water Yoga, the B.K.S. Iyengar Yoga School of Southwest Washington.*



# Navigating the Twists and Turns of Scoliosis

by Kisa Davison

My yoga practice began in college when I discovered that my back pain was due to scoliosis. I hoped that yoga would help. My practice was touch-and-go for many years, and the satisfaction I got from it had more to do with playing into my natural flexibilities than cultivating an awareness of what was beneath the surface. It seemed that there was always an excuse for why I couldn't go deeper into my practice—class schedule, work, knee surgery, marriage, parenthood. I was always ready and willing to do what was easy and comfortable, but I shrugged off the hard work as “impossible” because of my scoliosis. Then I found the yoga of B.K.S. Iyengar.

The scoliosis spine features both lateral curves and spinal rotations that cause the ribs of one side to push forward and the opposite ribs to protrude backward. The result is extreme contraction on one side of the body while the opposite side stretches. Not only does this reduce the ability to twist evenly, but the imbalance makes forward bends and back bends awkward and sometimes painful. With pain, frustration follows, and our *samskaras*—the habits that dictate how we hold ourselves and how we regard life—continue to embed more deeply into our physical, mental, and spiritual bodies.

Just as the body with scoliosis learns to compensate for imbalances, the mind and spirit also make adjustments that can result in a loss of sensitivity and adaptability. *Asana* for a student with scoliosis requires greater attention to the structure of the spine in each movement. The result of this re-awakened awareness is a more balanced posture, less pain, and a quieter mind.

During a week-long workshop at Northern Lights Yoga in Helena, MT, visiting teacher Lois Steinberg introduced me to a modification—strapping a Play Brick to back-pushing ribs—that encourages greater awareness of structural misalignments and provides a guide by which to realign the spine. From Lois's teaching I have developed an effective sequence for my personal practice that includes using the Play Brick in poses such as *Tadasana*, *Utthita Trikonasana*, *Uttanasana I*, and *Salamba Sirsasana*.



In seated poses, it is a challenge to maintain the alignment achieved in these standing poses. With time and attention, however, even the more difficult seated twists and forward bends can be both educational and enjoyable. The photo below shows how I use the lessons of the Play Brick in *Paschimottanasana*.



Working with the curves and rotations of scoliosis forces me to deepen my awareness of my body. The goal of *asana* is not to straighten the spine, necessarily, but to get us, all of us, to look inward at the deep-seated structural habits of our bodies and to create new maps to the center. As Lois pointed out, some of our *samskaras* are of our own doing and some have been handed to us by our parents and grandparents. In learning to work with the twists and turns of my spine, I am learning to work with the twists and turns of my life. Instead of throwing my hands up when life seems impossible to handle, I look for sensitivity, balance, and stillness.

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*Kisa Davison lives in Kalispell, MT with her husband, four children, and two dogs—all of whom provide her daily opportunities to practice all the aspects of yoga. She is currently working towards certification and studies with Judy Landecker in Helena, MT and Paul Cheek in Camas, WA.*



# Yoga and Healing

by Kati Johnson

I walked into my first yoga class, gripping my rolled up mat to keep my hands from shaking. I had flirted with yoga for years with videos at home but had never ventured well beyond my comfort zone to take a class. I was at a near breaking point at this time in my life and desperate for something, anything, to ease the profound despair that weighed heavy in my heart. I had tried Western medicine, Eastern medicine, therapy, vitamins and endless days listening to my logical brain tell me to pull myself out of the black abyss I was curled up in, but to no avail.

Though I had struggled with depression and anxiety, to keep my head above water, much of my life, it was after the birth of my first child that the bottom dropped out beneath me and I went down with it. She was born with a disability. Her condition was a surprise to us—though surprise implies a happy occasion. It was not. The struggles of new motherhood plus learning to care for this sweet baby who needed extra care and accommodation would have been enough to make the strongest person stumble. Add to it a post partum complication that nearly took my life plus two hospital-stay serious illnesses for her when she was two and you have me completely shut down and barely able to get through my hectic and stressful days. Mothering a child with special needs was, to me, the same as mothering a typical child. I did not know the difference—and so could not ask for the support I so desperately needed.

Nearly four years into my mothering journey, with new worrying wrinkles in my forehead and a few grey hairs reaching wildly toward some calmer place, I walked into my first yoga class. I was barely able to keep an anxiety attack at bay that evening and made mental notes of escape routes in case I should need to get out of the situation. When my instructor smiled serenely at me I almost burst into tears, my heartache so close to the surface. I moved through the poses with ease and noticed, after the first 45 minutes or so, that I was no longer shaking with anxiety and my jaw had relaxed somewhat. In *Savasana*, my relief was so

profound that I cried a few tears into my ears. Relief that the class and its accompanying anxiety were over, but mostly relief that I had found something that made me feel better. It felt like coming home.

I went back week after week feeling like I was coming up for air after struggling to hold my breath under water and found my anxiety quieted down more quickly each time. My stress, grief and anxiety from my real world didn't exist on my mat. I had created a peaceful sanctuary. Every *Savasana*, as I let myself release the tension in my body to the floor, a little piece of my emotional tension would leave my body, too. I cried.

When I was diagnosed with mild Bipolar Disorder several months after starting my weekly classes, I was able to use yoga to help me work out my fear and frustration as I learned about yet another "obstacle" in my life. I have been able to find emotional balance in the physical balance of *asanas*.

## My stress, grief and anxiety from my real world didn't exist on my mat.

Yoga has been the only thing that has been effective in treating my mood swings without negative side effects. When my cells are jittering and my breath is shallow in a manic state, yoga helps calm me by encouraging fuller breaths and giving every muscle a structured task to perform. When I feel like my body is 50 pounds heavier and I'm being dragged toward the ground in a depressed state, yoga soothes the aches and brings energizing blood to my brain. Yoga gives me balance, which is an often elusive and slippery place I am constantly trying to find. ■

*Kati Johnson lives with her husband and daughter in Bellingham, WA. She is enrolled in an advanced Iyengar Yoga class.*

## IYANW t-shirts are here



If you didn't get a chance at the convention to pick up one of the limited edition IYANW t-shirts designed by Don Gura, don't delay! These 100% cotton, ultra soft charcoal gray shirts come with the newly designed IYANW logo printed in lime green. They are available in both men's and women's small, medium and large sizes—but only while supplies last.

**\$23.00 each (includes shipping)**

Net proceeds benefit the IYANW Grant Program

Mail this form with your check to:  
or email [tonyag@hevanet.com](mailto:tonyag@hevanet.com) with questions

**Iyengar Yoga Association  
of the Northwest**  
P.O. Box 14682  
Portland, OR 97293

Quantity    Specify Men or Women    Size(s)    Total amount sent

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State

Zip

# Candidates Needed

For IYANW to continue to grow, we need the volunteer support of people like you. In August of this year, we will be holding elections to fill four board positions that will become vacant in January 2011.

As we look for potential nominees, we are looking for a wide range of yoga experience as well as diverse backgrounds that will help fulfill the responsibilities of the board positions. The seven-member IYANW board should be made up of teachers certified at different levels and at least one non-certified teacher or student. The board should also represent our geographic region (Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington).

Each board position has its own unique responsibilities. Some of these require experience in a specific area (maintaining a website, design and layout skills, bookkeeping experience, editing skills, database management, etc.). Board positions will be decided by the board after the election, assigning individuals to committees and positions that are most appropriate given the experience and skills of the board members. If you want to help spread the word about Iyengar Yoga in our region, we invite you to apply.

Board members serve a four year term. Meetings are held three times per year—two via Skype or phone conferencing and one in person at a location central to the majority of the board.

We seek nominations—you can nominate yourself or submit the name of an interested yogi—by June 25. If you are interested in serving on the Board or need additional information, please contact Tonya Garreaud at [tonyag@hevanet.com](mailto:tonyag@hevanet.com).

Upcoming Workshops – *continued from cover*

## Jo Zukovich

September 24 – 26  
Rose Yoga Center, Medford OR  
[roseyogacenter.com](http://roseyogacenter.com)  
541.292.3408

## Chris Saudek

October 22 – 24  
Julie Lawrence Yoga Center, Portland OR  
[jlyc.com](http://jlyc.com)  
503.227.5524

## Rebecca Lerner

October 29 – 31  
Sunset Yoga, Portland OR  
[sunsetyoga.com](http://sunsetyoga.com)  
503.539.4504

## Anatomy in Asana: foot/ankle/knee/hip

### Julie Gudmestad

November 12 – 14  
Harmony Yoga Studio, Spokane WA  
[harmonyyoga.com](http://harmonyyoga.com)  
509.747.4430

## James Murphy

November 5 – 7  
Iyengar Yoga of Bend, Bend OR  
[yogaofbend.com](http://yogaofbend.com)  
541.318.1186

## Support For Your Next Yoga Adventure

We encourage all IYANW members—not just teachers—to apply for an education grant to help fund participation in an upcoming workshop, an ongoing class, or assessment preparation. Members can apply for up to \$200. What's stopping you? Find the grant application at [www.iyanw.com](http://www.iyanw.com).

### Membership:

[iyanw@iynaus.org](mailto:iyanw@iynaus.org)

### Newsletter:

[denise.weeks@comcast.net](mailto:denise.weeks@comcast.net)

### General Information:

[tonyag@hevanet.com](mailto:tonyag@hevanet.com)



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P.O. Box 14682  
Portland, OR 97293