

Reflections
of
YOGA

two conversations with
B.K.S. IYENGAR

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INTRODUCTION

B.K.S. Iyengar, author of "Light on Yoga" and "Light on Pranayama", has dedicated his life to reinterpreting the ancient practice of Yoga, making it accessible to countless people all over the world.

Although he is not a man of words, "words can hypnotise and attract a reader," he said in "Light on Pranayama", and make him think he understands a spiritual experience", those words he offers are powerfully illuminating simply because they are a reflection of the beauty, refinement and clarity of his practice. As a teacher he is indefatigable, compassionate and patient but the unique fragrance of his art flows from the perfect balance of his words, his actions and his being.

On the two occasions I have studied with him at the Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Institute in Poona he has offered the following which, with his permission and deep gratitude, I am printing in full. Part One was recorded in January 1981 and Part Two in February 1982.

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PART ONE

Q. The majority of people do yoga once a week. What is the value of this?

IYENGAR: Something is better than nothing. To-day people cannot find sufficient time to practise. If they work once a week with a teacher the right thought will be imprinted on their minds and it will have a good effect. And this will last for about two or three days on the entire human system before it starts deteriorating. If people go to a teacher once a week and practise at home once or twice a week retardation will not take place and the functioning of the human system and the clarity in the brain will increase. It is worth going to a teacher in order to learn the correct presentation, then one has to practise at home, if not daily at least twice a week. Three days a week is enough to maintain the equilibrium in both body and mind.

Q. How can students recognise a good teacher?

IYENGAR: First of all - if yoga is taken from the commercial point of view it is definitely unfair. A good teacher will be truthful to yoga and the signs of yoga are the art itself. This puts a tremendous demand on each individual's practices and as long as the teacher does not practise the pupils who go to them should be a little bit guarded. They should ask the teacher every now and then to present what they are doing and not just accept their words. Teaching without practice is cheating the public.

Q. For many students practising alone is difficult so they attend many classes a week instead. Is this advisable?

IYENGAR: There is a very peculiar type of behaviour in the western mind which is also coming to the eastern mind gradually. They think that by going to different teachers they will accumulate knowledge. Knowledge can be acquired - it cannot be accumulated. It can only be gained by one's own practice. Knowledge is of two types - objective knowledge and subjective knowledge. Objective knowledge comes through books and study but subjective knowledge cannot come only from study, or books. It has to come by one's own experience. Just as a farmer cultivates plants, so you have to cultivate yourself in order to grow within yourself. For this reason when students think that they can accumulate a little from

here, a little from there, the damage comes. Suppose I am confused - if I go to another teacher I'm going to be more confused because I'm already confused. Suppose I continue with one teacher and absorb whatever the teacher says then there is a little maturity in me when I have to study the standard of another teacher. But going from one teacher to the other is not going to give any knowledge at all.

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Q. There's plenty of evidence that the asanas (postures) can improve physical health - can you explain how they do the same for mental health?

IYENGAR: Yoga is definitely a subject dealing with the mind more than the body. The moment we differentiate between the body and mind we are already ill because the body is the gross form of the mind and the mind is the gross form of the soul. As such there is no difference between body and mind. If you are pricked, it affects the mind. If you have sorrow, misery or unhappiness in yourself, the body is affected. They are inter-related and it is wrong to say that physical diseases are different from physiological and psychological diseases. Physical diseases are the anatomical body. Organic diseases are physiological and mental imbalances, distresses and moods are psychological. Any psychological fault or pressure affects the mind, which broods on it, then we call it a physiological disease. But the foundation of the psychological disease is the physical body. It is the physiological organs like the liver, spleen, pancreas, intestines, heart, lungs. So, when you speak of the physical body you have to always correlate the physical and physiological body, then when there is some upset in the physical and physiological body it has a bearing on the mind. You cannot control with the mind an organ that is not well but you can work on the affected organ. That's why the asanas and pranayamas were given so that you can concentrate on the physical and physiological body so that the mind, which is normally attached 24 hours a day to the body, is freed from the contact of the body because it is healthy. The moment the mind is released from contact with the body, it is free and it no longer wants to run after the exhibitiv nature saying, "Let me enjoy this - let me enjoy that." When you have this peace of mind free from the contact of the physiological and physical body spiritual knowledge - known as mental exercise - commences. The mind turns inwards knowing there is something which is beyond this peace, which is eternal and which has no sorrow, which has no pleasure. The mind says - let me seek that. That is how the signs of yoga are seen.

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Q. What is the difference between Hatha Yoga and Raja Yoga?

IYENGAR: There is absolutely no difference between Patanjali's Raja Yoga and Svatmarama's Hatha Yoga - yoga of the physical exercises. Svatmarama's "Hatha Pradipika" starts from the body and ends with the soul and Patanjali starts with the soul and comes to the body in the second chapter when he mentions the obstacles - dullness, diseases - which distract the mind, which are nothing but the body. Once you have conquered these, you are in a state of freedom. So there is no difference. One starts with the mind and goes to the body and after acquiring perfection says what freedom is. Svatmarama says that once your body is completely free and you know, then your consciousness and vital energy move together. The moment you know how to silence them you have experienced freedom. So one starts from the body and takes to the pinnacle of life - freedom. The other starts by explaining what freedom is, then what the obstacles to it are. When you conquer these you are in freedom. This is Raja Yoga. So there is no difference at all. One starts from one end, the other starts from the other but both reach the same point.

Q. But Hatha Yoga has definitely acquired an inferior image perhaps because many people believe that the body is inferior to the soul and should be spurned, not explored and refined.

IYENGAR: The reason is that to-day intellectuals behave like dictators and people are brainwashed. They cannot change because day in and day out it is explained that the body is different - the mind is different. But in fact the body is a part of the soul, it's a gross soul, the body. In ancient times it was not like that. If we look very carefully we see that previously they first studied Sarira Vidya (knowledge of the body) and when the body was completely mastered they went on to Atma Jnana (knowledge of the soul). That was how they were changing and transforming themselves. When something was achieved then going on to the next step. So just as the earth is supported by the universal god, for all branches of yoga, Hatha Yoga is like a turtle shell which is strong and cannot be broken. It is the fountain for other things. This is a quotation from the book but the writer does not say in all the 195 sutras that he is explaining Raja Yoga. Even Svatmarama deals with Hatha Vidya (knowledge of the will) not Hatha Yoga - Hatha means will. He says it can be seen as sun and moon - one is the negative current, one is the positive current. As if Patanjali has not dealt with the same ideas. Positive current is

practice, negative current is that which is not congenial to your practice which you have to renounce. He has not said renounce everything, just those obstacles or desires in the way of your practice. Renounce those so that your practice may become positive.

Q. Because knowledge of the body is no longer valued we are conditioned, brainwashed, as you say, to seek knowledge only from outside ourselves.

IYENGAR: For objective knowledge - agreed. But yoga is a subjective knowledge. Can you become a perfect musician by listening to talks about music? Yoga is like music. This is why they called it Raja - Raja means a king. Is the mind a king or is the mind subordinate to the soul, the spirit? How can the mind be the king if it is a subordinate to something else. So Raja Yoga is when the mind is completely merged in the soul and the soul becomes one. Raja Yoga, Samadhi, Unmani, Sunya, Asunya, Manolaya, Amanaskatva - all these convey the same meaning without any difference. The end of yoga is known as Raja Yoga because you are one with the universal spirit. So never differentiate between the body and the mind because the body is a cover. Another simple example is a letter in an envelope. The letter is the soul and the envelope is the cover. So your body and skin are the cover of the soul. If the cover is damaged the letter may fall anywhere. But if the cover is properly taken care of, the letter will not come out. So yoga makes the outer cover of the soul healthy so that it can be kept intact and move freely in the entire system. Your soul cannot fly here and there but is full within yourself, as a single unit.

Q. Would you say it is necessary to devote your life entirely to yoga in order to reach this state?

IYENGAR: For a teacher it is a must. As a teacher I have to devote my entire time to this subject. Preachers are different. A preacher may not be a religious person, because he only throws knowledge and goes away. But when I'm teaching that means I have taken the responsibility for you completely on my head. You have given your problems to me. So do I have to work more or do you have to work more?

Q. You do. But for teachers in the west perhaps with busy, complicated lives ...

IYENGAR: It's a must. Otherwise the fineness of the art will never come to them. As teachers they have to give fineness. They have to illumine their pupils.

Q. So if they have diverse interests, is this fineness not possible?

IYENGAR: Not to the highest extent. Can a musician with a diverse attention become a top genius?

Q. It depends what the other interests are. If they are reading, going to the theatre, or even climbing mountains, then these can assist

IYENGAR: That is akin to the subject. Ah then I say yes. But diverse?

Q. The word was misleading ...

IYENGAR: Yes anything akin. Patanjali has said that if all the 24 hours your thought is fixed, whatever the subject may be, as long as it is in line with your way of thinking, that is meditation.

Q. Yes that's what I had in mind.

IYENGAR: Yes ... I see ... that's correct. Then it will be wonderful ... it will add to your own experience.

Q. The other experiences will become finer.

IYENGAR: Yes. Much finer.

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Q. Does a serious study of yoga presuppose a belief in reincarnation?

IYENGAR: It will not occur to a yogi at all. A true yogi will never think of creating an incarnation. That's the beauty of the perfect practice, because his actions make him purer and purer and as such the idea will never strike him. There are three types of actions: present actions, accumulated actions, and the effect of those accumulated actions. In the practice of yoga (it's the same for asana and pranayama) suppose you are stretching your right leg and do not think of your left leg. You have created an action and because you forgot the other leg there is room for reaction.

Suppose you react on the left leg when you are acting on the right leg, reaction and action meet together and there is no further action. You have washed off your actions and as you wash off your actions more and more, your reincarnations shorten. So as long as action and reaction do not meet together that means I have accepted the responsibility. It is not a belief - it is a fact. As a writer don't you like to improve the presentation of your words? Don't you want to become finer and finer? What does that word finer convey? In technological terms to become finer by perfect actions. Indians call it reincarnation. Westerners say I want to become finer and finer. I want to become the finest in the art. I can give you another example regarding divinity and precision in instruments. What does that word precise convey? That from every angle our product is perfect. In ancient times if they had not used the word perfection but the word divinity, what difference was there? There was no word for perfection. They were only saying it is divine - it is pure. Purity is divinity. Perfection is pure. .

Q. But unfortunately words like 'divinity', 'purity', even 'spiritual' have lost this precise meaning. They convey other things.

IYENGAR: That is what I'm saying. So the technological word for them to-day is precision and perfection. A precise body - your instrument the body should be very precise, perfect, so that the mind is completely detached. It has no attachment within because it is completely freed from itself. The instrument itself is completely perfected by the practice of yoga. So if we look at it that way there is absolutely no misunderstanding. It is only in coining the words that we create a lot of misunderstandings, misconceptions. But in actual practice, in actual experiences, the words will not fight because you are sure of your experience and you cannot change. But if you go on reading books - this person says this, that person says that, it may be this or it may not be this, you are proceeding but not coming to any conclusion and you carry the inconclusive sentence further. But once you have experienced something you say, no I've experienced this, and you can't go further.

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Q. There are many therapies available to-day which promise instant enlightenment. They offer easy solutions and apparent answers to our fluctuations between sorrow and pleasure. What is the effect of these therapies?

IYENGAR: Tell me, is there anything in the world which is instant? Instant therapy is only like the petal of a flower, which blossoms and then drops off. But the practice of yoga, if it is maintained, cannot drop off. The petals are kept as fresh as ever, forever. So that is the difference. Here there is a discipline involved. If a farmer does not look after the land, if he does not remove the weeds, can he grow anything?

Q. Maybe accidentally something will grow.

IYENGAR: Accidentally. But how many centuries may it take? But suppose he attends to it? And that is the difference with yoga. The instant effect is accidental, so they may benefit but not permanently.

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Q. Thousands of students from all over the world have studied with you. Your teaching is so compassionate, so dynamic that each one is profoundly affected and each one sees you differently. How do you see yourself?

IYENGAR: I am made of different facets, I'm not a single faceted man. I'm not a mono type of person. I can face anything at any time, according to the situation, because I am a man of principle and a man of principle will have no two minds. Because I am finer - have a finer method of teaching naturally I know what I have to do. I'm a creator. I'm creating, but I do not change my base but from that base I am cultivating lots of things. In my teaching, I'm trying my best to make each individual an original person. So while teaching I am a tiger. You can call me a lion, you can call me a tiger. There I'm a dictator. But afterwards I'm very soft. And even though I am strong while teaching, my heart melts if I see people suffering. So I go out of my way to help them, to relieve them. I am so mobile - I have to change the whole entire system for that person. My teaching is not the same ABCD. I can teach ABCD, CBDA or I can teach DCBA. That mobility I have got in me has sometimes been misunderstood as unpredictable.

Q. Would you say that you and yoga are the same thing?

IYENGAR: I am almost one. Synonymous. Iyengar and Yoga - Yoga and Iyengar. Whatever I have done up to now I am 100% clear about what I am doing. I do not even touch a person on a pose or on a teaching point which I have not experienced.

Q. How would you say that you as a yogi, as a teacher, differ from all the other gurus?

IYENGAR: For the simple reason, that I am non-attached and if the people come it's for them. I've not invited anyone to come. That's one difference. Others advertise that they will do this or do that. But I don't say that. That is why I say that I am still pure. In my walk of life, I'm just like an ordinary man. Nobody knows that I'm a yogi when I go out on to the street. But unlike others I don't ask my followers to come with me. So this is the difference between me and others which anybody can see. My way of living is quite different. I live like an ordinary innocent man, after yoga. I'm an ideal to anybody. I'm a family man. Yet you ask my daughter and she says - My father never cares for us. Why should she say that if I'm a family man? That means I am non-attached even to my children. I have no desires in life. The desires have all gone. My desire is only to practise and to teach those who come.

Q. And if nobody came?

IYENGAR: I don't care. One day I may go into voluntary retirement, myself. Not because I have become old. But my practice I will never stop. I will be here only - I will not go anywhere. But I will be practising myself so that people can come and see. I will not stop that. There are lots of yogis, lots of people are running after them. But it is for each person to find out where the real peace is. It is in each individual. It is not outside. In the practice of yoga, it will clearly come to the person that peace is within himself and he need not depend on anyone.

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PART TWO

Q. Why is yoga better for children than other forms of developmental exercise, like gymnastics?

IYENGAR: The difference with yoga is that each and every part is attended to, even though they are children, because my system of

yoga is completely rational. If we ask children to stay a long time in poses their brains get dull because they don't want to. They are always searching for new things and so we have to adapt yoga to suit this. I go on changing so that the interest in them is created tremendously so that when they grow they take this subject religiously, honestly and philosophically so that they can live in the utopias of yoga. But in the beginning the current of yoga should flow in the bloodstream through physical means only.

Q. At what age should a child start?

IYENGAR: A child can start from the age of six or seven - in our institute there are children from the age of six to seventeen. Yoga can be divided into several compartments: for children yoga should be taken as physical exercises. When they go to the colleges where anatomy is taught we should teach yoga from the physiological level - how the organs work - and then when they have a certain maturity in their way of thinking then it should be taken as mental culture. When they finish college and go to the university the highest degree, the philosophical aspect of yoga, can be taken. If we divide yoga like that the child from the very beginning will learn from the concrete and reach the abstract without any doubt, confusion or fear.

Q. Could you outline the advantages of having yoga in the school curriculum?

IYENGAR: If you take cricket you know the area they require for only eleven people fielding, two people batting and one umpire. In that field about a hundred to a hundred and fifty people could practise yoga. So from the economical angle yoga is better. The same is true for football. But it is not only economical - you must consider the constitutional value or the effect of yoga. If a cricketer is a right-hander the right side of the body is more active than the left. The same applies to a footballer or a tennis player. They all become stronger on the right side. Yoga cannot neglect one part in favour of another - equal or aligned movements are introduced, equal attentions are given so that there is harmonious development between the right and the left body, between the back and the front body and between the body and the mind. And as well as physical development, social development comes automatically to youngsters. Whereas in other sports if one or two are good only they become stars, the advantage with yoga is that all can become stars because it can accommodate many people in a shorter

time without boring anyone.

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Q. One of the most common reasons people start yoga is they are told it will help them relax. They have the idea that it is easy, soothing, gentle, and requires no effort. What is the real meaning of relaxation?

IYENGAR: Nobody can relax unless the attitude and aptitude of mind and cells are in co-ordination. It is not as easy as saying - do yoga and you will relax. When we practise we have tremendous potency or intelligence to make use of the cells to their maximum effect so that they do their job and feed back into the system for its own growth. There is no artificial death. To-day in the modern world stress, strain and speed are what they call the enemies. The reason is that our brains are working faster than the spinal nervous system, or the muscles or the capacity of an individual. It is a competitive world. Each and everyone wants to get to the top of the ladder. They fear failure to such an extent that there is no room for their brain to relax. Fear complexes interfere with the blood current and the nerves get blocked, the arteries get blocked due to the stress and strain. They overload themselves imagining that something might happen. Real stress does not give that type of hypertension - imagined stress has increased these diseases in people more than factual strains. There is a tremendous area in our body to stretch, to create space horizontally, vertically, because our body is made up of five elements - earth, water, fire, air and ether, and ether is space. Though this body has a frontier, the skin, yet there is a space inside as there is a space outside so these movements of yoga create tremendous inner space due to our stretching in correct movement. The nerves develop mobility, the arteries do not get blocked because of wrong eating, wrong thinking. So these poses make the blood circulate as if they were irrigating the entire system and because of this tremendous irrigation by oxidised blood and a healthy supply of energy through inspiration the load on the nerves is never there. Even while they are doing yoga they feel relaxed because that is the effect of yoga.

Q. So true relaxation is a quality - a balance in the system - which can deal with any amount of real stress.

IYENGAR; That's true relaxation.

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Q. To-day largely because of drugs we are effectively able to

protect ourselves from a lot of pain. Consequently we tend to be confused about it. Could you throw light on the nature of pain.

IYENGAR: There are two types of pain: pain which comes from disorders in nature or pain created by one's own abuses and uses of body and mind. These are either bearable pains or unbearable pains. Bearable pain which gives a certain soothing feeling is healthy pain. Sometimes when we do yoga we like to live in the pain because it is a healthy pain. But excruciating pain which persists day in and day out is injurious to the body and the mind and we have to work to eradicate it. Without physical pain there is no mental pain but as we have the power of discrimination it becomes a psychological disease more than a physical disease. It is true that we are made up of intellectual defects and emotional disharmony, but emotional disorders cannot be controlled by intelligence. If you are unhappy and you don't know the cause of that unhappiness or you lose a very near and dear person, intelligence is not going to help you accept these sufferings. But emotional pain can definitely be conquered when the nerves, which are known as the unconscious mind, have the tremendous power to withstand the load. If they cannot then emotional diseases increase. The same is true intellectually - if we are overworked and the nerves are not capable of taking that load we become hysterical. So yoga has the tremendous advantage of feeding the central nervous system to such an extent with its own energy that it makes one able to bear this pain. Yoga also has the method to eradicate pain. If a thorn has pricked you, you use a needle to remove it. But because the pain from the thorn is excruciating the needle is less painful because you have already relaxed the nerve by using your discrimination. You know that you are removing it so in that process alone your nerves are relaxed, your mind is concentrating which relaxes the tension so the other piercing is not felt as painful. So in yoga if we have slipped discs, dislocated hips, dislocated shoulders, we work them, as we use a needle to remove a thorn. We use certain postures in such a way that we introduce a good pain to eradicate a bad pain. Not all pain is bad.

Q. But medicine even in the birth process tries to eradicate all pain by means of drugs.

IYENGAR: Do you know why? One - because we are emotionally highly strung. Two - doctors want to make the delivery convenient. But it is not happening naturally. If you watch the child, when

the delivery is natural the mother will have a natural, composed mind and the child will also grow healthily. But doctors frighten the patients saying you should not do this you should not do that. Medicine has become a negative not a positive form of health. No doctors give courage to the patients as we give courage to them. If you can walk we say why don't you climb. Doctors say - if you are walking don't walk. If you ask: 'May I take exercise?' they say, 'No, no, don't exercise'. That means the seeds of fear have already been put into your mind. Whereas we yogis say, if you can walk why don't you run. We take the other angle to find out what type of positive mind you have. We have to develop a positive mind. The yogis have power because of these poses in which there is a tremendous pain which we lessen which gives them positive hope. So fear complexes lessen. Heart patients are told to do nothing. Stay in bed. But if you show them how they can rest their hearts even when they are standing, or walking, which way they have to keep their spine, it will give them a sort of hope, is it not? But to-day medicine with all its advantages has created more fear in people's minds though technologically it is far advanced. But if they told us that our body is a precise machine and although millions of things are happening, e.g. millions of insects must be going in to us with the atmospheric air and we are living in the polluted areas, yet we are not dead - nothing has happened, except a little cloudy lungs here and there. We can make best use of our bodies even in that polluted air, through yoga. But they don't think like that. And even the medical people smoke tremendously, and they advise us to take oxygen. They tell us to go to Switzerland and even there on the mountains they go on smoking. So though in one way there is tremendous development in medical science they have created tension in the peoples' minds by saying: 'Don't do this. Do that. Take these pills - while eating, before eating and after eating' but they don't go deep into each person to find what their weaknesses are and how they could build up their own strength. Yoga is really a boon if you study it like that.

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Q. Meditation - transcendental, kundalini - is often marketed as an answer to stress and pain. Consequently many people these days want to bypass the yoga postures and go straight to meditation. How would you enlighten these people?

IYENGAR: Meditation has to be done by one's own tremendous effort. If it could be marketed like pills then there would be no pain, no war, no enemies at all. To-day people believe there must be something in the traditional approaches of yoga and philosophy, but

others are cashing in. Kundalini is a divine energy. How can a divine energy awaken in an undivine person? To have divine power we must be equally divine. So also, how can one separate the body, mind and soul? The body is the envelope of the soul, the mind is the inner layer of the soul. One is the cover of the other. Who is seeking whom? To know spiritual life or to hunt for the self? Who is hunting? The body is not hunting, the mind is not hunting. The self is hunting the self. So suppose you use the instrument which is seeking to know the seer. The seeking is also the seer, the object is also the seer, the subject is also the seer, the instrument you are using is also the seer. So - when the seer is one where is the division? Because people do not know what they can see, they want to know what they cannot see and that is what yogis have said from early times. That's why the eight aspects of yoga - Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi - start from the physical. Then from the physical they inter-penetrate to know how the mind is behaving inside the body. Then from the mind you understand the self because it is the outer layer of the soul. So unless and until these three are co-ordinated no-one can have a spiritual awakening, spiritual awareness.

Q. And that spirituality is awakened through the asanas.

IYENGAR: It is. If the gurus and yogis say gaze at a candle and you will develop spiritual power, I will say gaze at your toe, at least you will gain some knowledge that this toe is crooked here and that that toe is not crooked. Which enlightens you more, a candle or looking at your own toe? So use the body as a candle to penetrate deep inside. In the Bhagavad Gita they use the words field and the fielder (farmer) - field is the body and the fielder is the soul. If you see fallow land unused, nothing grows in it. Or something grows accidentally and it may take a long time. If berries grow without any attention you call them wild. The field may grow or it may be dormant - the potential is there. But if the farmer uses that land you do not call them wild berries because he has cultivated them and they are full of nourishment. So also the body is the field and the self or the spiritual part of the body is the fielder. There should be tremendous communication between the field and the fielder and when the field is known as the known and the fielder is known as the unknown, the unknown and the known come together and that is a spiritual person. The known merges in the knower and the knower engulfs the known. The knower is the unknown. The self becomes one with the body and the body,

which is the known, merges with the unknown as the knower so there is no seeker, no instrument for seeking. All are one and that is spiritual sadhana (quest). It is like two sides of a coin. Which side is inferior, which is superior? What is the difference? One is the head, the other the tail - that's all you can say. So also the body is one side of the coin and the self is the other side of the coin, we cannot separate them. You should know both the edges.

Our body is made up of 5 sheets or layers: the anatomical body, the physiological body, the psychological body, the mental body, and the intellectual body which westerners do not know (they call it only the mental body). The mental body is a gross body - the mind has no discriminative power but the intellect has discriminative power knowing what is right and what is wrong. That is why yogis divided the body into one layer of intellectual body and one of mental body because the intellect is known as buddhi - understanding knowledge, not acquired knowledge. Knowledge is of two types, objective knowledge is acquired knowledge and understanding knowledge is subjective knowledge. So when you reach the height of subjective knowledge then the intelligence is completely pure and when the intelligence is completely pure then that person is pure and is called a spiritual man because his words do not waver at all. He is not living in the mind, whatever he says he says from the soul. There is no doubt, no oscillation in him. His words are 100% mature and that's why they are known as words of wisdom. When we practise yoga we start from the anatomical body then from the anatomical body we inter-penetrate towards the organic body and from the organic body the inter-penetration is of the mind. From the mind we inter-penetrate to the discriminative power finding what is correct and what is wrong. Even through the asanas all these things can come. We have the power to discriminate between the right side or the left side while doing the poses. Then like the river merging in the sea your self or the soul will cover the entire human body and become one with it. Then only is it a full blown yoga, not otherwise. Inter-penetration of the intelligence from the cells or from the skin towards the soul and from the soul towards the skin is the understanding of the body and the mind which has no separation into physical body or spiritual body. They are all one. In sleep do you differentiate between the body, the mind and the soul? Is it physical sleep or spiritual sleep or mental sleep? So - the yogi simulates those areas as it was in sleep in a wakeful state and lives with thorough awareness and at the same time as a witness.

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Q. I've heard you say that one of the qualities of a student is surrender. Can you explain this?

IYENGAR: Unless and until the pupil knows the subject he has to surrender. The teacher knows the art, the pupil has come because he does not know. The method is given by the teacher, so that's why we say surrender. Then after learning, after maturing, you can come and discuss with me. The argument commences - Yours is the right way of thinking or mine is right. But in the beginning if you start using your brain you have no idea of the depth of it. You don't know what to do with it and that's why surrender is a must in the beginning.

Q. I have also heard you say that we (your students) are very proud. Can you enlighten us further?

IYENGAR: While I am teaching I use the word pride. Actually it is a disease of the intellect. You live in the intellect and you send a message from the intelligence that you want to move something. But how do you know that the knee is able to move, to flex, to turn or revolve? Your head may say you can do Padmasana, but your foot, your hip and your knee should say. So I use the word proud because you use will power to dictate to the body. But suppose the body does not listen and you use force. You injure yourself. That is a bad pain and that's why people complain that yoga gives a lot of pain because they use their intelligence with inflation. So don't use the brain, the brain is meant to analyse. Factual things come from the cells of the body and if there is understanding between the cells and the brain then you are moving harmoniously and you will not injure yourself, on the contrary you will derive a lot of energy. It's all right to use will power to learn objective things but here you have to sublimate your will because you are playing with your own body, your own self. After all the body is the outer layer of your inner self so how can you use the same will which can be used objectively, on the outside of you. Inside of you, you should know when to use your will and whether it is a destructive power or a constructive intelligence. If it is a constructive intelligence then you surrender to the body, you surrender to the movement. If it is destructive you break your legs, and so that is why I say you are proud when you calculate from the intelligence, from the head alone. For example, as I said before, when you remove a thorn you do not use will power to poke the needle into your foot, you gradually do it, surrender to the skin. So that is the way you have to think and although I may use

the word 'pride' actually it is not pride but inflation saying I think you can do it. Why not say 'My knee is capable of doing it'. Don't say I can stand on my head. Your head, your cells have to say whether it can easily balance your head. If you think in that way then there is no 'pride', no inflation, nothing and you will be a healthy person because that is known as healthy development - balancing your will power with your physical capabilities. Westerners use tremendous will power and Indians surrender to such an extent it is also bad. So - even when I say surrender I am not saying it to everyone for all time. But for that particular correction surrender so that you understand what I am doing. Among the Indians I have to create will power. They are capable of doing it but they cannot - so I have to create will power so they can bring it to act on their bodies.

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Q. The hallmark of your teaching is compassion which, you have told us, is the most important attribute of a teacher. Because this is easily confused with sympathy and indulgence, could you explain the nature of true compassion.

IYENGAR: Suppose you are suffering, whether it is an emotional, an intellectual or a physical pain, I think I should go out of my way to relieve you immediately, but my good words will not relieve you. They are escaping words because as long as you are listening you may say I feel better but the moment I go the pain returns. I have to see that it is relieved to a very great extent so that a lot of mental development takes place. But this type of compassion is a cruel approach and even the medical people don't do this nowadays. They are afraid to touch patients because the law doesn't protect them and hence they can treat you without even touching you. But how can I remain sitting here and you sitting there and show you compassion. It is a false compassion. But suppose I am suffering from that same problem, how much I would work to get rid of it. So I take that same compassion, that same love, affection, crudeness or cruelty as I use on myself to help you. That is real compassion. Somehow or other I have to give you immediate relief, but not by saying take these pills and you can forget the pain. That's commercial. But where is love?

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Q. Is it necessary to have a good knowledge of the sources of yoga philosophy to reach the pinnacle of yoga?

IYENGAR: No, not necessary. Does a tree understand that it has to give a particular fruit which should be nourishing, tasteful, and all those things? Provided you have a single-minded approach

just see where it leads. Why should you need to know? Who are you to fix your goal? But if you practise, and keep your mind open, you may experience more light than by deciding in advance what you want to experience. Does the river know it has to flow only in this direction and not in another direction? It's culmination is in the sea. So it is with the sadhana - the right practice will automatically take you higher and higher without your being aware you are developing. I will give you my own example. I was the bottom student in my class always. I have not scored any passing marks in my life at all. That's why I had to leave my education. So I was uneducated, I was a crude person. I took to this art only to get rid of my TB. Did I read books? Did I study under gurus to know? I said what was given to me let me perfect it and to-day you can see what was developed from it. To-day I can talk as if I had tremendous background and why should I read books? The other day I was saying that Patanjali is perfectly right when he said there are three ways of knowing - direct perception, inference, then books. But reverse that, read the books first and you start oscillating. You may say this book has said this, that book has said that. But if you put into your practice what the books say then you know what direct perception is, and you will not wonder whether that book is right or this book is right. Then when you get direct perception is it necessary to infer, is it necessary to read books? So this is the development which comes if we do not depend on anything except the truth of right practice.

Q. Many students have to study the asanas and pranayamas from books because they don't have access to a teacher. Is it possible to learn the correct practices in this way?

IYENGAR: Oh yes. Some years ago when yoga was relatively unknown I was telling people that a teacher was necessary, although everybody was thinking that a teacher was essential. But I learnt more on my own than from my guru. But at the same time in order to save time, only in order to save time, I said to learn from a guru is a thousand times better because your trials and errors are lessened. Then my book was published and the BBC interviewer said that once on the television I had said that yoga should be learnt under the guidance of a teacher. Now your book is out what do you say? I said immediately that a good book is better than a bad teacher. And I still say that if you get a good book - Patanjali's quotation book - infer, and then experience it yourself. One can learn from a book but it takes a long time. My book is now in the

13th or 14th impression. How many people must be using it if it has gone to that? I can put it another way. Why do we send children to schools and colleges? So they may learn sooner than at home is it not? We give them extra teachers so that they can learn more quickly. So also in yoga to learn quickly teachers are required. If you take your own path development will take place. I will not say no, but it is a longer course. Patience, tolerance, and perseverance are required. Only to lessen the trials and errors you go to an experienced teacher so that you save so much time.

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Q. For many years you have been successfully treating people with a variety of ailments. Could you tell me why you have succeeded where others have failed?

IYENGAR: Well that is a difficult question which I don't like to answer - although I think I have answered it already when I spoke about compassion. When a person has been suffering for many years I say let me at least give some months' relief in their lives so that they can do something. I attack the person as well as the disease and I don't care a pin for their grumblings because my attention is on the disease. Sometimes I will go with affection and soft words to make them forget and do the work from the part which requires it. My intention is (in my approach I don't see it only as yoga) to see how far I can bring healthy blood to that part so that energy is supplied for that organ to recover from its weaknesses. This is my secret.

Q. So people are effectively curing themselves with your compassion.

IYENGAR: Exactly. I know that if such and such a pose is done the blood circulates tremendously, which irrigates and supplies sufficient nutrition for that area to recover. That's all, I say nothing more. In a simple sentence that is why I'm successful.

Q. Many people suffer from allergic complaints these days. Is yoga able to help this?

IYENGAR: The medical terminology for allergy is as old as civilisation, it is not a new word. In India - this is where the philosophy comes into it - we say it is my fate. What is the difference between fate and allergy? You go to a villager and he says he doesn't know what he has done in his past life for which he

is now paying. Allergy is the same. We cannot know the cause, we don't know anything, so it persists. It must have come from heredity and it may continue for generations and generations as a hereditary disease, an inherited weakness. Your inner environment, your inner defensive strength is not capable of withstanding the external conditions. With asthma this means the atmospheric air. Why do people suffer from allergic asthma, to give just one example. Because their inner defensive strength is definitely too weak for them to withstand the external elements. But through yoga, when it is balanced, the allergy disappears. That is again nutrition - how to supply healthy blood.

Q. So in fact an allergic condition can be cured by the practice of yoga.

IYENGAR: Naturally. The yogic text says that if you continue to work from now on this allergy may not be passed on. Coming generations may be free from this weakness, this illness because you will have created the defensive strength within you. This is Patanjali's quotation, I am not giving anything.

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Notes

Asana	Posture. The third of the eight stages of Yoga.
Bhagavad Gita	The Divine Song. One of the source books of Hindu philosophy.
Kundalini	The divine energy symbolised by a coiled serpent lying dormant at the base of the spinal column.
Padmasana	Lotus posture.
Patanjali	The ancient sage who first systematised Yoga philosophy in a collection of terse aphorisms (sutras).
Pranayama	Knowledge of the breath, the fourth stage of Yoga.
Sadhana	The practice, quest.
Svatmarama	Author of the "Hatha-yoga-pradipika", a classical text written in the 14th Century.