

# B.K.S. IYENGAR YOGA

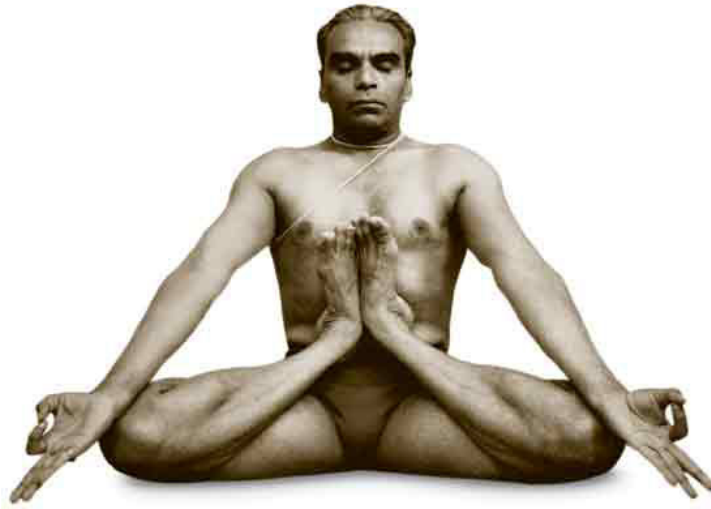
## THE PATH TO HOLISTIC HEALTH



The definitive step-by-step guide

WITH A NEW CHAPTER CELEBRATING B.K.S. IYENGAR'S LIFE AND WORK





B.K.S. IYENGAR  
YOGA  
THE PATH TO HOLISTIC HEALTH



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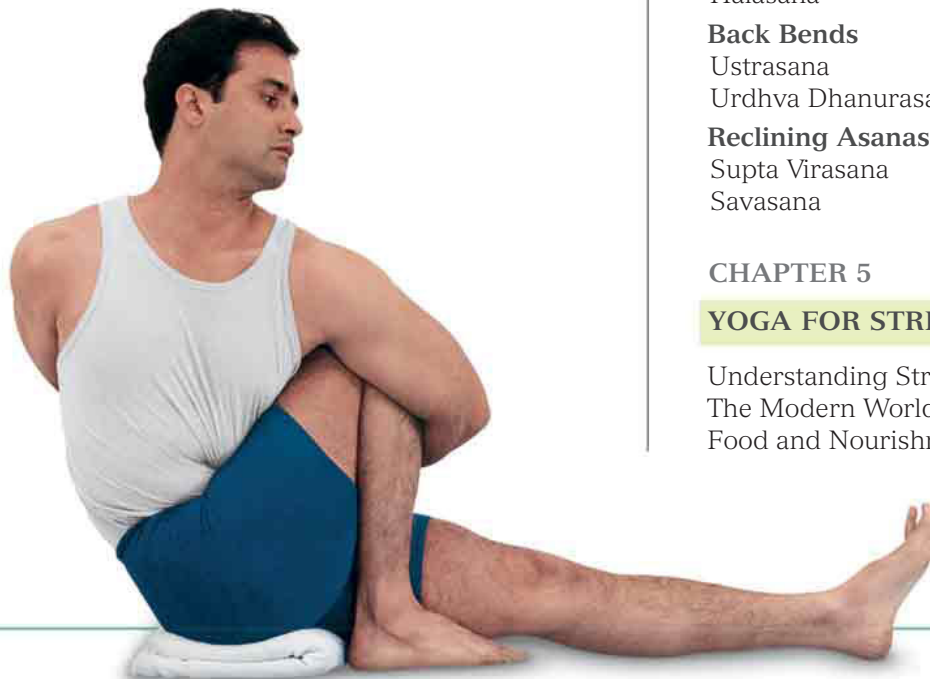
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# Foreword

by Yogacharya B.K.S. Iyengar

Yoga is for everyone. You need not be an expert or at the peak of physical fitness to practice the asanas described in this book. The strain of modern life can lead to physical pain and illness, as we neglect our bodies in the race for material success. The stress of modern life can also lead to mental suffering: feelings of inadequacy, isolation, or powerlessness. Yoga helps to integrate the mental and the physical plane, bringing about a sense of inner and outer balance, or what I term alignment. True alignment means that the inner mind reaches every cell and fiber of the body.

During seventy-three years of teaching and practicing, I have observed that some students pay attention only to the physical aspect of yoga. Their practice is like a fast-flowing stream, tumbling and falling, which lacks depth and direction. By attending to the mental and spiritual side, a sincere student of yoga becomes like a smoothly flowing river which helps to irrigate and fertilize the land around it. Just as one cannot dip into the same river twice, so each and every asana refreshes your life force with new energy.

My effort in this book has been to focus on techniques, so that even the beginner will have a thorough understanding of how to practice asanas in order to obtain the maximum benefit. By using a few simple props, students with different capabilities can gradually build up strength, confidence, and flexibility without the threat of strain or injury. The yoga techniques described and illustrated in this book can also help those with specific ailments. Regular practice builds up the body's inner strength and natural resistance, helps to alleviate pain, and tackles the root, rather than the symptoms, of the problem. Across the world, there is now a growing awareness that alternative therapies are more conducive to health than conventional ones. It is my hope that this book will help all those who want to change their lives through yoga. May yoga's blessing be on all of you.

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## CHAPTER 1



# LIFE AND WORK

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*“When I **practice**, I am a **philosopher**.  
When I **teach**, I am a **scientist**.  
When I **demonstrate**, I am an **artist**.”*

It is almost impossible to contemplate the art of yoga without considering the contribution of the revered yoga master, B.K.S. Iyengar. From humble and inauspicious beginnings, Iyengar displayed a truly remarkable fortitude and determination to improve his situation and health through the art of yoga. His genius and insight into mastering and defining the ancient practice has popularized yoga today, making it accessible to millions all over the world and allowing them to discover the enlightenment of spirit enjoyed in the life of a dedicated yogi.

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# Iyengar the Guru



B.K.S. Iyengar triumphed over poverty and childhood ailments to master and revolutionize the art of yoga. Credited with bringing yoga to the West, he has also made it accessible to millions of people all over the world.

The path to greatness, to becoming a legend, is strewn with disappointments, failures, and anxieties. Enduring and surviving testing times demands unrelenting persistence, dedication, and focus. B.K.S. Iyengar, who has been awarded two of India's greatest civilian awards, the Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan, remembers such times. Today, he is living testament to the triumph that can follow adversity.

"After many strides forward, when one looks back, things seem to fit," says Mr. Iyengar. He is at the Ramaamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute in Pune, India, waiting for a cup of coffee. It is late afternoon and the evening classes are about to begin. The students are trooping in, but stop when they spot their guru sitting near the office. They sit down on the floor, to listen; it isn't often that you get to hear a legend talk about his life, his successes, and his journey toward conquering the body, intellect, and mind.

At 95 years old, B.K.S. Iyengar is a living legend; a simple man who sought to master and immortalize the ancient discipline of yoga, and became a guru. His rise to success can only be described as an act of strong willpower, extreme perseverance, burning determination, and sheer obstinacy.

## Humble beginnings

Bellur Krishnamacharya Sundararaja Iyengar was born on December 14, 1918, in the tiny village of Bellur, close to Bangalore, a city that is now India's IT hub. He

was a sickly child with thin arms and legs, a protruding stomach, and a heavy head. "My appearance was not prepossessing," Mr. Iyengar says. His father died in 1927, when he was eight, leaving the family in absolute poverty. "There was a time when we couldn't pay the school fees and I was not allowed to sit the exams. My brother took me begging for money," he recalls. Despite his present successes, he clearly remembers these challenges from the past. "Poverty acted as a garland for knowledge. If I hadn't been born into such a poor family, I probably wouldn't have gained anything. I am grateful that poverty followed me for years. Knowledge was born from this poverty."

## Introduction to yoga

In 1934, Mr. Iyengar received an offer he couldn't refuse from Tirumalai Krishnamacharya, a respected yoga scholar, who was married to his sister Namagiri. Krishnamacharya, considered the father of modern yoga, ran a yoga school at the Jaganmohan palace of his patron, the Maharaja of Mysore. He asked Mr. Iyengar to move to Mysore to help Namagiri with household chores, securing his destiny.

Krishnamacharya was a taskmaster. "I don't think he saw any real potential in me. He told me to practice asanas to improve my health," Mr. Iyengar says. "I jumped at the offer. Health had been a perennial problem for me since I was born." It took three years of practicing yoga before Mr. Iyengar noticed a distinct

(top) B.K.S. Iyengar adjusting his son Prashant's posture while he does the Vrschikasana (Scorpion pose), 1960–1961.

(left) B.K.S. Iyengar at the Ramaamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute in Pune, 2008.

*“An inner voice urged me to **persist** and carry on. My will alone **held on.**”*



**B.K.S. Iyengar** (extreme right) with his guru Professor Tirumalai Krishnamacharya (center) and the Prince of Mysore (second from left) in the early days (1937).



**Mr. Iyengar** with his wife **Ramaamani** in 1960. She became his student and one of his strongest supporters.

change in his health and this encouraged him. “My guruji (Krishnamacharya) barely paid me any attention during this time. Later, he taught me just the outline for the basic asanas—the classic yoga postures. I grasped the rudiments of each asana and practiced on my own. I learned the difficult postures, such as Vrschikasana (Scorpion pose) and hand balancing, during the public performances we used to participate in! I don’t know what Guruji really saw in me, but I think he recognized that I had guts.”

In 1935, the Maharaja of Mysore arranged a yoga demonstration. Mr. Iyengar was getting ready to present some of the asanas, but Krishnamacharya threw him a challenge. He asked Mr. Iyengar to perform the Hanumanasana (Great Split, where the legs are split forward and backward). “I had no knowledge of this asana. My guru described the pose and I realized it was difficult. I told Guruji that my shorts were too tight. It would be difficult to stretch my legs. He asked one of his senior pupils to cut the shorts on each side with a pair of scissors. Then he told me to do the asana. I did it, but with a resulting tear in my hamstring that took years to heal. Guruji was impressed and asked me how I had managed it. He told me that he didn’t think I would be able to do it, but I did. The token I received from the Maharaja of Mysore was nothing compared to those words of praise from my guruji.”

### **The beginnings of Iyengar yoga**

“I learned a valuable lesson that day. I realized that attempting certain asanas suddenly, without preparation, could harm the body and the mind. I started evolving the asana sequences scientifically. I developed a progressive approach from simple to difficult asanas. I categorized them by their effects, as being purifying, pacifying, stimulative, nourishing, or cleansing. Guruji lit the fire of yoga within me. But I did not learn it in the form that it is today. I struggled with and traced the missing links of refinement and precision. I evolved my guru’s method, so that a set of asanas could be practiced followed by another set, using the alignment of the intelligence in the asanas,” Mr. Iyengar says.

Krishnamacharya had made an indelible impression on Mr. Iyengar. “In our wheel of yoga, he was the hub. We, as spokes, rolled the wheel without



(left) An early family portrait of B.K.S. Iyengar and Ramaamani with their children, 1959.

creating bends or dents in it. Unfortunately for all his intellectual progress, his ways and moods were unpredictable. We were afraid to talk to him, let alone question him. Yet his conduct, firm discipline, perseverance, vast knowledge, and powerful memory left a permanent mark on our lives.”

### Teaching while learning

In 1936, the Maharaja of Mysore sent Krishnamacharya and his students on a lecture tour across the state of present-day Karnataka. Soon after this Dr. V.B. Gokhale, a well-known surgeon, asked Krishnamacharya to send a student to the Deccan Gymkhana Club in Pune, to teach yoga for six months. Mr. Iyengar was 17 and spoke a little English, although he couldn't speak Marathi, the local language. However, he was deemed the obvious choice. “Besides the language barrier, the college students often made fun of me as they were older and better educated,” he says. “I suffered from an inferiority complex because of my *shendi* (tuft of hair, typical of orthodox Hindu Brahmins). But I decided I would not be dejected. I worked hard to prove yoga's worth.” Mr. Iyengar's term at the Club was extended every six months for a period of three years.

The years that followed would prove to be the darkest period in Mr. Iyengar's life. He lost his job at the Deccan Gymkhana Club and with the exception of two or three students, his teaching had practically come to a full stop. “It was a testing time of tears, failures, and anxieties. In hindsight, it seems that this was the darkest hour before the dawn of prosperity,” Mr. Iyengar says. “An inner voice urged me to persist and carry on. My will alone held on. I practiced intensely and taught yoga to whoever was interested. I cycled miles to reach students' houses. There were days when I survived on tap water, as everything else was unaffordable. I had no guarantees, no help, and no support from my family. Failures gave me determination and showed me a new light and a fresh way to progress. I used the tool of disappointment as an appointment for a new assignment. Failures, stalemates, and disappointments strengthened my will to pursue this path of yoga with determination, and God graced me in my path.”

Amidst this struggle for sustenance and recognition, Mr. Iyengar married Ramaamani in 1943. “My financial



B.K.S. Iyengar felicitates T. Krishnamacharya on the occasion his 60th birthday.



(right) A young Geeta Iyengar, Iyengar's daughter, practices the Virabhadrasana 2 (Warrior pose 2).

position was dire, but family pressure prevailed and we were married against my better judgement. We celebrated our marriage on borrowed money," he says. Ramaamani was unfamiliar with yoga in the beginning, but she soon became a dedicated student. "She was quick to help me in my practice. She developed sensitivity and a healing touch. Without Ramaa it is possible that my method of yoga and myself would not be what we are today," he says. "I used to tell Ramaa to observe my posture while I practiced yoga, and to correct me. She was my mirror to achieve accurate form."

There is no doubt, Iyengar says, that Ramaa sacrificed her dreams so that he could pursue his art. "When I left my family to teach in Europe and the US, she faced many problems. For example, there were massive floods in Pune in 1962, and people rushed to their terraces with their possessions. But Ramaa's sole concern was to keep safe the manuscript for my book *Light on Yoga*."

### The rise of Iyengar yoga

Gradually, the number of students who wanted to learn from Mr. Iyengar increased. After he helped a young girl recover from polio of the spinal column, word of B.K.S Iyengar's healing touch spread, too, both locally and within the medical community. The turning point, he says, came in 1946 when both Mr. Iyengar and his wife had similar dreams of divinity. "From that night on, fortune favored us. People suffering from various diseases started coming to me for relief," he says.

It was around this time that Mr. Iyengar was introduced by a student to Jiddu Krishnamurthi, one of India's greatest philosophers. Mr. Iyengar, however, hadn't heard of Krishnamurthi. "I hadn't read his books and I didn't know he was one of the greatest thinkers in the 20th century, but I started to attend his lectures in Pune. He was fond of saying, 'Do not criticize and do not justify.' He taught me not to be disturbed or swayed by people's opinions. Yogis all over the world criticized me for doing what they considered 'physical yoga.' I was very clear about what I practiced. I never felt the need to justify what I was doing. Even now, I do not bother about other people's remarks, but instead focus on evolving my own practice. Nor do I criticize others or their systems.



B.K.S. Iyengar with the famous philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurthi (right) who became a loyal student, 1955.



*“A fortuitous meeting with Lord Yehudi Menuhin in 1952 introduced the world to Iyengar yoga.”*

Krishnamurthi paid me a great compliment when he wrote, ‘You have taught me yoga for 20 years—whenever someone asks me who is the greatest yoga teacher, I always send him or her to you.’”

Iyengar’s dream of making yoga popular, however, was reaching a critical juncture. It was a fortuitous meeting with celebrated violinist Lord Yehudi Menuhin in 1952 that introduced the world to Iyengar yoga. Menuhin was in Bombay and was due to meet Mr. Iyengar but almost canceled the meeting. “I understood the state of his mind and persuaded him to give me five minutes. I made him lie in Savasana (a reclining asana that helps recover the breath and cool the body and mind—see pages 170–172). In that lying position, using my fingers, I guided him in Shanmukhi mudra (the placement of fingers in a particular position on the face to block out the senses). He fell asleep for almost an hour!” says Mr. Iyengar.

“I had never heard of him before. I soon realized that he was a celebrity, but to me he was another human being with a physical ailment that I could cure,” he says. Menuhin was exhausted and suffering from hyperextension of the bow arm. Guided by Mr. Iyengar, his condition improved quickly. He was so pleased that he gave Mr. Iyengar a watch with the engraving, “To my best violin teacher.”

### **Tackling misconceptions**

That five-minute interview blossomed into a lifelong friendship. Menuhin invited Mr. Iyengar to his home in Gstaad, Switzerland, and later to London, introducing him in Europe and the United States. Iyengar yoga was all set to take off, but this was a difficult time in which to introduce and establish the form. Mr. Iyengar discovered this during his visit to London in 1954. “When I arrived at Victoria Station, the customs officers asked me my profession. When I said yoga, they asked me whether I could walk on fire, chew glass, or swallow blades! Yoga was unknown in the West and the Occidental concept of yoga was next to nothing,” he says. Menuhin introduced him to friends interested in learning the form. “It was a tough time. Everyone is interested today, but then it was difficult for any yoga practitioner to teach the local people. Yoga was not respected. A lot of people saw me as a colored man from a former British colony. I faced a



Mr. Iyengar gives a BBC TV interview with Nigel Green (far right), 1962.



Violinist Yehudi Menuhin (left) learned yoga from Mr. Iyengar, 1956. But the Yogacharya considers Menuhin his guru in the art of Pranayama (the yogic practice of breathing).

*“The **tree** is still spreading. The **winds of yoga** are **blowing everywhere.**”*



B.K.S. Iyengar gives a demonstration at the Jewish Society during one of his earliest trips to London, 1963.



B.K.S. Iyengar gives a public performance to an enthralled audience in Japan, 1984.



B.K.S. Iyengar with His Holiness Pope Paul VI at the Vatican in August, 1966.

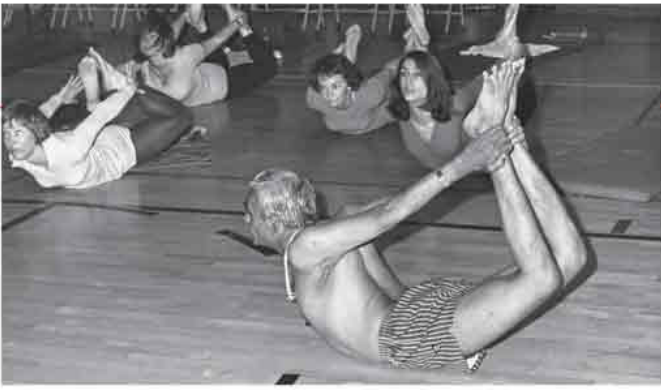
certain amount of discrimination in the early days in the UK and the US. Yet, at the same time, there were people who showed me a lot of hospitality and friendship.”

Mr. Iyengar started by giving demonstrations in bars or any other place where people gathered and showed interest. “People smoked and drank in my presence. I changed them slowly. I did not demand respect. I earned it. In time, they sought permission to drink wine at the table. Later, they stopped smoking or drinking. It was not a sudden transformation. I was tolerant. My inner voice told me not to criticize. I had gone there to propagate yoga.” Mr. Iyengar traveled to the US in 1956 at the invitation of Menuhin’s friend Rebekah Harkness, the Standard Oil heiress. His demonstrations were, however, confined to the Harkness family and their friends. It would take more than 18 years for Iyengar yoga to finally make an impact in America.

One of Mr. Iyengar’s key encounters took place in 1958 when he met and taught Queen Elisabeth of Belgium. The Queen was 84 when she invited Iyengar to teach her yoga. “I began with simple standing poses and the Halasana (Plough Pose—see pages 150-153). She was not willing to stop. She wanted me to teach her Salamba Sirsasana (Headstand—see pages 138-143). She was frail and I knew by looking at her that she had problems with her heart. When I asked for her medical reports, she said, ‘Sir, if you have faith in yoga, why do you want my medical reports? If you are afraid of teaching me the head balance, then you can take the next train to Gstaad, and join your friend Yehudi who recommended you!’ I appreciated her courage and persistence. I told her, ‘If you have the courage to do the head balance, I have the courage to teach you.’ After she did the head balance, I taught her asanas to bring her blood pressure down,” he says. Mr. Iyengar continued to teach the Queen until her death in 1965.

### **Yoga for the people**

Mr. Iyengar returned to London in 1960, again on the invitation of Menuhin. This time he wanted to teach everyone and not just celebrities. Menuhin arranged classes for him through the Asian Musical Circle, founded by Mr Ayana Deva Angadi, an Indian settled in London. In the beginning, there were only four students and lack of funds had him turn the backyard of Angadi’s house into a classroom. But slowly his practical



(left) B.K.S. Iyengar teaching a class at Ann Arbor in Michigan, 1973.

demonstrations attracted more people.

Iyengar yoga made an important cultural crossover in 1966 when Mr. Iyengar met His Holiness Pope Paul VI. “I was blessed to have an audience with him. Both of us discussed the subject of yoga. It was one of the happiest moments of my life. The Pope caught my hands and blessed my good work. His Holiness praised me with the words, ‘You are a professor and director of yoga. I bless you with all my heart and am happy to have met you.’”

This was also the time when Mr. Iyengar’s book *Light on Yoga* was first published. It was an instant classic, drawing people to the art of yoga. Menuhin wrote in the foreword, “Whoever has had the privilege of receiving Mr. Iyengar’s attention, or of witnessing the precision, refinement, and beauty of his art, is introduced to that vision of perfection and innocence which is man as first created.” The book became an international bestseller and has since been translated into 18 languages. It is often called “the bible of yoga.”

### The Ramaamani Iyengar Memorial Institute

Yoga was finally making an impact across the world. Students started traveling to Pune to learn the form from Mr. Iyengar and his wife Ramaamani recognized the need to create a yoga school. Mr. Iyengar used proceeds from *Light on Yoga* to buy a plot of land in Pune. But three days after the inauguration in January 1973, Ramaamani became ill and died. Work continued and the institute finally opened its doors to students in 1975. “Though she is no more, I am never separated from her—for she is always in my heart. The Ramaamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute is my tribute to her,” he says.

Today, thousands of Iyengar students arrive at the Institute to study his unique concept of yoga and to imbibe his rigorous discipline. “I began with two students. Today, millions are practicing yoga,” Mr. Iyengar says. “My students teach in schools, colleges, yoga centers, and sports clubs in major US cities. Yoga has breached Apartheid with many South African students attending my classes in London in the early 1960s. I have students in practically every European nation, as well as Russia and China. The tree is still spreading. The number of students influenced by my teaching is impossible to know, but it is certainly in the hundreds of thousands. The winds of yoga are blowing everywhere.”



B.K.S. Iyengar being greeted and welcomed by followers in China, in 2011. His books have all been translated into Mandarin.





# The Iyengar Approach To Yoga

Iyengar yoga is a holistic experience that benefits the body, mind, and emotions. The driving force behind Iyengar yoga is B.K.S. Iyengar's belief that yoga is for everyone, and that it is effective in reducing modern-day stress.

In the early days, while practicing and teaching yoga, B.K.S. Iyengar experienced an inner dryness. He questioned its persistence since he knew his technique was correct, and used his body and intelligence to study himself while practicing. His inner consciousness became his guru. He learned that while practicing any asana, it is important for the body and its organs to work or move in a certain way, without leaving their alignment. He penetrated the organic body by closely examining his outer body, the skin's movement, and the alignment of his physical body. He discovered that perfect symmetry removed undue stress and restored the organic and cellular body to its original state of health. The inner dryness disappeared.

As Mr. Iyengar observed his inner organic body in different asanas, he felt various channels (*nadis*) open from within. These channels allowed the energy (*prana*) to flow, spread, and circulate in every part of the body including the nerves, skin, and brain. He attained a feeling of alignment, sensitivity, and intelligence. This process of performing each asana with microscopic awareness, self inquiry, and mind and body feedback brought a revolution in Mr. Iyengar's practice and, in turn, his teaching.

## Aligning the self

Many yoga practitioners are flexible and practice asanas in a habitual manner, without involvement or reflection. Mr. Iyengar teaches his students to understand that asanas are not just about the movement of the physical body; there has to be a microscopic awareness and

inner penetration, so that the asana becomes an asana in the real sense. He realized that there is an instrument of awareness in everybody. The average yoga student is aware of his or her body with respect to the asana's technique and outline. However, most do not understand the concept of developing inner awareness.

Mr. Iyengar awakens the intelligence within. This allows practitioners to sharpen their awareness resulting in an inner action. For example, during Tadasana (Mountain posture—see pages 68–69), Mr. Iyengar goes beyond “Stand with your legs and feet joined together.” He asks the students to question the need to align the inner and outer foot. Alignment increases the sensitivity in the foot and balances the energy. Now, the practitioner lifts both sides of the knee resulting in a firm grip of the quadriceps, moving it closer to the thigh bone. In Tadasana, the firmness in the thighs leads to a lift in the gastric and lower abdominal region. This, in turn, elates the thoracic and organic region; the breath automatically becomes deeper and more rhythmic with corresponding changes to the senses, mind, and emotions.

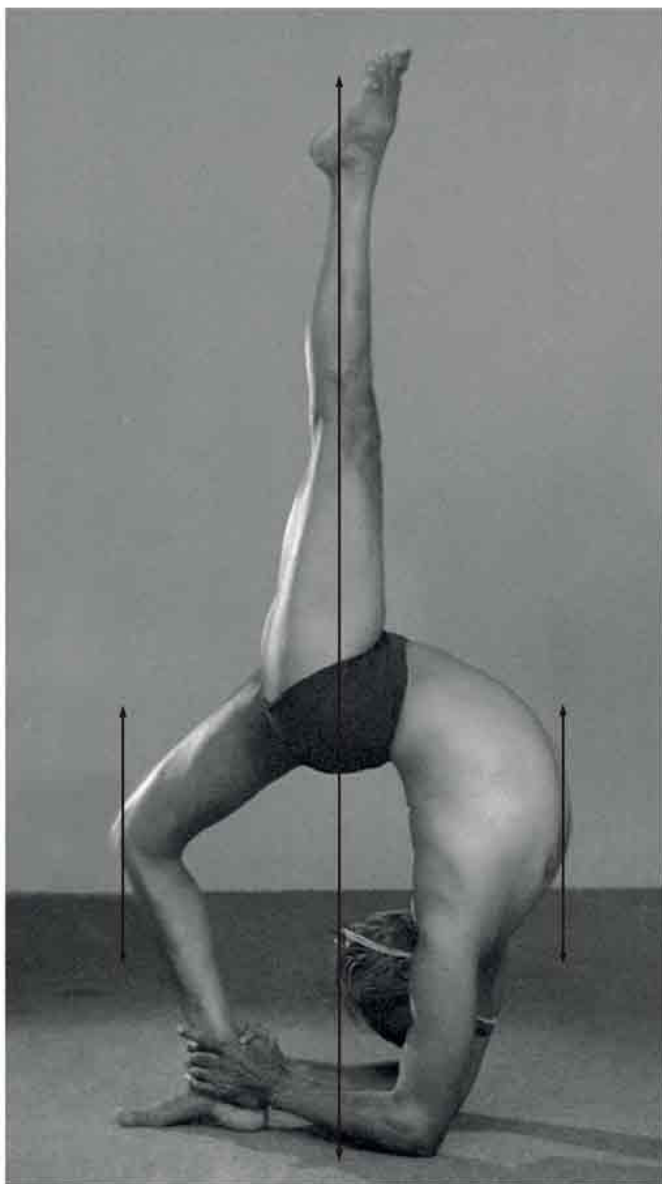
## Balancing the energy within

Mr. Iyengar's teachings might appear to be physical in nature, but the casual spectator cannot observe the internal workings of the practitioner's mind. He believes awareness brings perfect balance between work output and energy expenditure. Correct utilization of the mind and body ensures that the energy is retained and correctly distributed.

(top right) A young B.K.S. Iyengar.

(left) Mr. Iyengar, age 24, practicing the Pari Purna Matsyendrasana (Complete Lord of the Fishes pose).

*“Energy can flow only when there is attention and purity of breath.”*



Alignment increases sensitivity and balances the energy within the body. Above, Mr. Iyengar (age 62) demonstrates the importance of alignment as he practices the Eka Pada Viparita Dandasana (One-Legged Inverted Staff Pose).

Every person has two facets of energy: the *pingala* or the *surya nadi* (masculine energy/sun) and the *ida* or the *chandra nadi* (feminine energy/moon). The sun is positive energy representing heat and daytime activity. The moon is negative energy representing coolness and nighttime restfulness. Mr. Iyengar understood the importance of creating the perfect balance between the right (*surya nadi*) and left (*chandra nadi*) sides of the body. Alignment and precision allow the energies to work, interact, intermingle, and unite, bringing about health and balance. Optimum energy is used in the correct practice of yoga and leads the practitioner to a state of equilibrium (*samatvam*). The *Bhagvad Gita* scripture states: *Samatvam yoga uchyate* (Yoga is the state of equilibrium). Sage Patanjali, who wrote the treatise *Yoga Sutras*, explains that the differentiation between the muscles, limbs, joints, organs, mind, intelligence, and self has to disappear to reach this state of equanimity. Mr. Iyengar ensures that students bring more of their consciousness into each asana, through precise instructions and demonstrations. Through this they begin to experience equilibrium.

Mr. Iyengar’s inner awareness made him realize that the breath is an instrument to be used at the right time and place, to move inward. Today, asanas are taught with precise breathing instructions. So, to achieve the Padmasana (Lotus pose—see page 54), teachers may say, “Exhale and bend the right knee, and place the right foot on the left upper thigh.” But Mr. Iyengar also shows the inner channel of breath. He teaches one to exhale through the nostrils and, as the action takes place, to feel the effect at that point. In Padmasana, the effect of the breath and mind relaxes the knee. When the knee is stiff, the exhalation has to be of a certain quality. It is a surrendering breath that softens the senses of perception, and relaxes the brain, easing the movements in the asana. When the practitioner corrects an adjustment or goes into the asana in the right manner, the attention and breath flow with the action. Energy can flow only when there is attention and purity of breath.

### The power of sequences

Sometimes, despite their best efforts, students are unable to perform certain asanas. Mr. Iyengar teaches his students to practice a series of actions before moving on to difficult asanas. Sequencing helps them derive the essence of the asanas, experience their beneficial effects,

and elevate the mind's structure. Mr. Iyengar has always taught his students the way the eight limbs (*astanga*), as enumerated by Patanjali, form a whole (see pages 52–53). He says, “*Ahimsa satya asteya brahmacharya aparigraha yama* (YS II.30).” This means that the five pillars of *yama* are nonviolence, truth, and abstinence from stealing, continence, and greed for possessions beyond one's need. Its principles build the right mannerisms that help us attain the sight of the soul. Mr. Iyengar feels practitioners often apply force (*himsa*) to perform asanas that can lead to sprained muscles, painful joints, shakiness in the breath, and instability in the body. Mr. Iyengar often says, “The brain and body cannot be like dry earth. It is the intelligence or the mind that softens them into clay.”

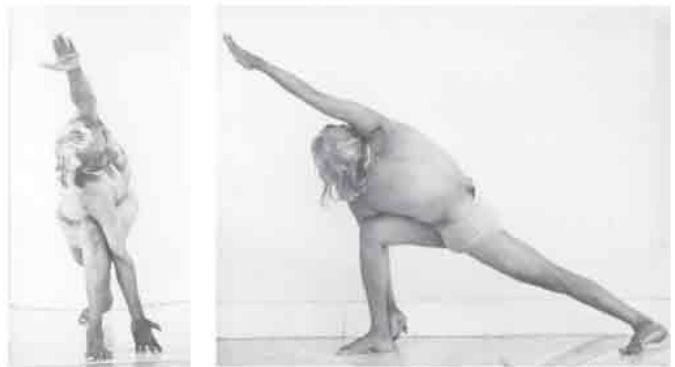
Mr. Iyengar asks each practitioner to use his or her judiciousness while practicing asanas. He teaches the importance of setting goals in order to perfect asanas, but also insists that students be compassionate toward each part of their body. Students should know their capacity. Careful intelligence, like the scales of justice, has to balance violence and nonviolence.

### Bringing honesty to the practice

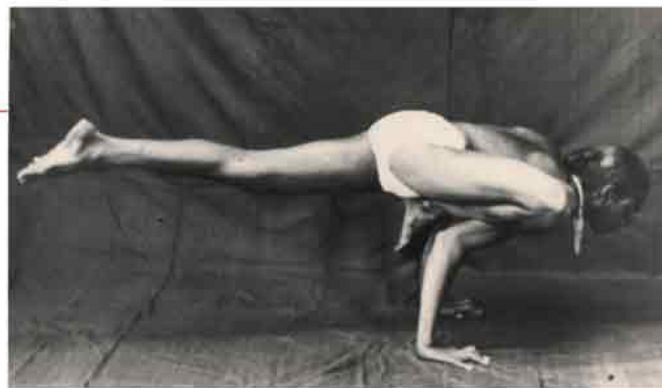
The mind, “I” consciousness, and intellect together form the consciousness (*chitta*). The “I” consciousness contains willpower, ego, and humility. Willpower allows one to stretch the elastic of the “I” consciousness carefully from ego to humility and vice versa. Humility relaxes the brain leading to introspection. Then awareness and sensitivity arise helping the practitioner move toward the self and connect with the soul.

Mr. Iyengar urges his students to practice with sincerity and involvement. This involvement made him a yogi and a master of yoga. Without this element of truthfulness (*satya*), asanas remain mechanical and repetitive. He tells his students to study the awareness and alignment in an asana. If they do not observe the right and the left side as they perform the asana, one side becomes more dominant since it “steals” energy from the other, leaving it weak and dull.

There is enthusiasm and chaos in early practice of yoga, when practitioners often get carried away and aspire to advanced asanas, without practicing the simpler postures that benefit the body and mind. This is a facet of greediness (*steya*) and possessiveness



Mr. Iyengar (age 65) demonstrates the correct alignment for the Parivrtta Parshvakonasana (Resolved Side Angle pose). He says, “My way of practice focuses on alignment leading to precision, which is a divine state. This is where the individual soul and the Universal soul intersect.”



(right) B.K.S. Iyengar, age 17 holds poses with the utmost concentration, stilling and quieting the senses to achieve a state of *dhyana* or meditation.

(*parigraha*). The practitioner unknowingly allows possessiveness to enter the practice. So, the right side of the body may be stronger and better aligned than the left, leading to a dissonance of energy. The right side becomes overnourished, the left undernourished.

*Brahmacharya* means to know the *Brahma*, to reach the soul. The practitioner should practice yoga with complete involvement, with the purpose of reaching the *Brahma* within. The aim of the practice should always be foremost. The practitioner must follow the principles of restraint (*niyama*): cleanliness (*saucha*), contentment (*santosa*), austerity (*tapas*), self study (*svadhyaya*), and devotion to the Supreme Being (*isvara pranidhana*). Students should observe internal cleanliness and bathe each cell of the inner body through good blood circulation and flow of energy. Good health and healthy living leads to contentment.

This isn't easy, but it helps curb anger, greed, and desire, allowing the practitioner to progress on the yogic path. Mr. Iyengar does not subscribe to the path of easy practice. He demands self-discipline. Ease and comfort are against the principle of yogic discipline and limit the mind. Fear of certain asanas limits the boundaries of the mind. Yoga is meant to purify the body and penetrate the mind. The mind must have that zeal and strength of will to bear physical pain that comes with correct effort. Austere and intense practice of yoga leads the practitioner toward *svadhyaya* and *isvara pranidhana*. The study and practice of yoga with devotional attention on God is meditation. Mr. Iyengar says it is the conscience (*viveka*) and not the brain that tells the practitioner whether the asana has been done with religiosity and judiciousness.

### Awakening the inner eye

When Mr. Iyengar guides his students' senses of perception, asking them to allow their organs of action and mind to turn inward, he doesn't expect an automatic cessation of all thoughts and focused inner concentration. Rather, the students need to use their inner eyes—alertness (*prana*) and awareness (*prajna*)—to observe every part of the body. One should exist everywhere in the body. The soul (*atman*) is the owner of the physical, spiritual, and psychological faculties (*indriyas*) but they cannot be used for enjoyment (*bhoga*). They must serve their master in a pure and correct manner.

*Pratyahara* is a state of bringing control over the *indriyas*. While practicing, one has to focus completely on the inner body, drawing the mind inward and then sharpening the intelligence. The senses of perception are closely allied with the brain. That is why Mr. Iyengar says, "Eyes are the window of the brain and through the ears the brain goes out." While doing asanas, the gaze of the eyes should be inward. In *Uthitha Trikonasana* (Extended triangle pose—see pages 70–75), the head is turned up, and the student is asked to look up at the ceiling. But the focus should not be a light or a patch on the ceiling. There should be no connection between the eyes and external objects. It is the passive inward gaze that allows the eyes to remain passive. In turn, the skin of the face softens and the brain is freed from tension and anxieties. When the senses of perception are relaxed, the brain becomes void (*shunya*). The thinking process ceases. When the senses of perception turn inward, the energy is balanced evenly in the body and true equilibrium is achieved. Now, the asana is complete.

### Achieving a mindless state

Equanimity leads to a state of emptiness in the body and mind, bringing serenity to the body cells and stability to the mind. The practitioner learns to stop invading thoughts from entering the brain. It is a mindless state. Mr. Iyengar often says, "I teach *dharana* in the asana itself. The foundation for *dharana* and *dhyana* (meditation) has to begin from the practice of asana and pranayama. Just as a surge of high voltage can damage electrical equipment, in a similar way luminous energy generated in *dharana* and *dhyana* can damage the nervous system of a person who has not practiced asana and pranayama."

Mr. Iyengar refers to "*Desha bandha cittasya dharana*," which means to fix one's attention on one thing within the body for long periods of time. For example, the mind can be held in the knee in *Salamba Sirsasana* (Headstand—see pages 138–143). While in this pose students are unable to view the knees with their physical eyes and instead, they have to use their microscopic eyes (*dharmendriya* eyes). This allows the consciousness to spread to the dull areas, correcting different disparities and increasing the span of those microscopic eyes. It creates equanimity in the body. Asanas may look physical



*“In the ultimate stage of yoga, **the seeker** is free from the dualities of body and mind, and mind and self.”*



The guru's son Prashant Iyengar teaches students to become one with the asana, during a class at the Institute in Pune.



Mr. Iyengar advocates the use of the inner eye to observe every part of the body. “One should exist everywhere in the body,” he says.

from the outside, but Mr. Iyengar makes his students aware of the microscopic eyes and builds intelligence in the students. He is strict so his students can achieve this state within the asana. He scolds the student who looks at the clock but allows their leg to remain crooked. He isn't correcting the physical imperfection—he focuses on the dissipation of energy that has to be checked while bringing the wandering mind to a single point of concentration.

### Freedom from dualities

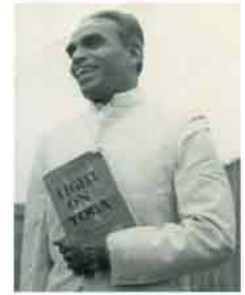
In the ultimate stage of yoga, the seeker is free from the dualities of body and mind, and mind and self. Mr. Iyengar explains that dualities have a direct connection with the *tri gunas* (three qualities), *tamas*, *rajas*, and *sattva*. By nature, the body is *tamasic* (dull and sluggish), the mind is *rajasic* (active and dynamic), and the self, *sattvic* (illuminative). *Tamo guna* (fear and pain) manifests itself in the form of vices and bad habits. Mr. Iyengar uses asanas to challenge his students and the Iyengar approach destroys the sluggishness in the body. It is not just a technically accurate asana appearing to have the right presentation; it is the awakening of the intelligence and the surfacing of a sense of purity (*sattva guna*).

Mr. Iyengar does not pamper his students and urges them to practice daily for an hour, to challenge the body and mind. He advocates the use of props (see pages 182–185) to learn the right alignment and action in the asana. When discernment sets in, he believes, one should practice independently with introspection, comparing the feelings one gets while working with props to those without props and resulting in incorrect movements.

Mr. Iyengar understood that yoga practice must be modified as and when one recognizes one's temperament, to achieve expected results. His method ensures that a *tamo-gunic* asana transforms into a *rajasic* asana by applying the right techniques. In the beginning, there are many movements and adjustments to be made. Once that is done, true steadiness comes. A vibrant asana is one of calm and poise; this is *sattvic* asana.

The process of meditation is dependent on the *sattva guna*. It brings calmness, and the practitioner becomes one with the asana. The dualities between the body and mind fade. This disappearance (*pratiprasava*) happens only for yogis who have reached the highest state of *samadhi* (self-realization). But the seed is sown in the practice of asana and pranayama.





# The Iyengar Legacy

B.K.S. Iyengar’s unique vision for yoga continues to flourish through his family and his students. His passion for bringing positive changes to the lives of others can be seen in his charitable work at his birth place, Bellur.

It’s a Tuesday morning in the city of Pune, India. The incessant rain has taken a short break. The Ramaamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute seems empty, but the large, first-floor hall is busy. A group of students go through their ritual practice, with careful determination and focused intensity. They contort their bodies using ropes, blocks, and towels as aids and props to gain the perfect posture.

B.K.S. Iyengar is practicing yoga in a quiet corner, near the window. His skin ripples as he settles into postures, pushing his body to unimaginable limits, but with beauty and grace—poetry, almost. Mr. Iyengar slips into the final posture. It looks complicated. The Dwi Pada Viparita Dandasana, or the Two-Legged Inverted Staff Pose, is an advanced back bend. But there is no exertion, just a seamless flow. The students, an eclectic mix of people from different parts of the world, have stopped practicing. They sit around their Guru, in a semicircle, watching in complete silence.

Mr. Iyengar comes out of the posture and sits up to catch his breath. The students break into spontaneous applause, cheering and whistling. He smiles as the applause continues. “Hope you are inspired,” he says. “God bless you.”

The students stand up, stretch, and go about their practice. Many of them are dedicated Iyengar yoga teachers, certified and working at centers and schools across the world. They come to Pune in the thousands, throughout the year, to study under

Guruji (as his students lovingly call him), to learn the philosophy behind Iyengar yoga, and imbibe his rigorous discipline.

## A family of teachers

Mr. Iyengar is now retired, but his children Geeta and Prashant continue his work, as does his granddaughter Abhijata Sridhar. They teach extensive classes, molding students to become practitioners who truly understand the meaning and purpose of Iyengar yoga.

Abhijata grew up watching her grandfather practice yoga. She would travel to Pune during her summer vacation. “We would play on him during his practice. He would be in an asana and we would go under him or jump over him. But when I realized what he did and the way he did it, I was in awe,” she remembers. The fascination for yoga stayed and her understanding of the form developed, as she recognized that yoga was not just for the elderly. “I began to realize that yoga is for me, too,” she says. Today, when she isn’t teaching, Abhijata works with Mr. Iyengar, honing and understanding the intricacies of each posture.

The family comes together for the medical classes, working with students suffering from medical conditions. Guruji is a tough teacher; a disciplinarian. He chides and scolds the teachers as he gently corrects the patients’ postures. “How are you feeling now?” he asks one of them, a woman lying, propped with bolsters under her back. “Much better,” she says.

**(top)** First published in 1966, *Light on Yoga* contains invaluable teachings from B.K.S. Iyengar and is called “the Bible of yoga.”

**(left)** B.K.S. Iyengar with granddaughter Abhijata Sridhar (left) and daughter Geeta Iyengar (right) at the Ramaamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute, Pune.

*“You can go anywhere in the world and practice Iyengar yoga.”*



Abhijata Sridhar learns the correct yoga posture from her grandfather and guru B.K.S. Iyengar.



Children practice yoga under Mr. Iyengar's guidance at the Ramaamani Institute in Pune.

### Complete surrender

This fierceness is a manifestation of Mr. Iyengar's passion for yoga, according to Penelope Chaplin, founder member of the Iyengar Yoga Institute in Maida Vale, London. She is one of the seven "Most Senior Leading Teachers of the UK," a special designation awarded by Mr. Iyengar in 2009. Penelope first met Mr. Iyengar in 1971 while attending a class he was teaching on Paddington Street. She used to suffer from a bad back and an extreme lack of confidence. "He stood behind me and said, 'As long as you are afraid I cannot help you.'" That's when she realized that the only way she could learn from Mr. Iyengar was through complete surrender, without challenge or resistance. Iyengar yoga has since formed the core of Penelope's life for 45 years.

"For me, his work has been like cement keeping the mind and body together. I was very supple, but he taught me to work from within rather than just from a physical action, although that understanding took quite a few years to develop," she says.

Abhijata almost echoes Penelope when she says, "Guruji teaches us yoga using the metaphor of the body. It's our habit to not look at the bigger picture. We need to develop the sense to understand Guruji's language," she says. "We need to develop receptors to yoga. This is the way our asanas can evolve. This is the way our living can change." The Iyengar form of yoga has changed her life, she says. "It has changed the way I think... the sacred lesson he has taught me, is to do what I do fully, wholly, and completely, with my heart and head. Guruji taught me the binary system in life; he has taught me the meaning of zero and one."

### Crossing borders

There is no doubt that Iyengar yoga has transformed how the world views the form. It has transcended cultures, borders, and religions. The Institute has more than 3,800 certified teachers across more than 40 countries, from the US and the UK, to Italy, Spain, Germany, and now China.

"You can go anywhere in the world and practice Iyengar yoga," Mr. Iyengar says. "Today, I am the happiest man on earth, because with all the damnations and frustrations, I have not only earned name and fame for myself, but I have brought back respect and majesty to this art and science called yoga."



(left) It's rare for the students to watch B.K.S. Iyengar practice yoga, but when they do, they get a rare glimpse of the man who is a legend.

If I had not given more than 15,000 lectures and demonstrations single-handedly, I think yoga would not have become popular."

The influence Iyengar yoga has in the world today is evident, whether in Mr. Iyengar's famous meeting with Pope Paul VI, his first visit to South Africa as a guest of the government, the yoga demonstration he gave for Nikita Krushchev during the Premier's visit to India, or more recently, his visit to China in 2011. "When I arrived in China, I did not know what to expect. The response was unbelievable. It was only during the China-India Yoga Summit that I discovered that most of my books have been translated into Mandarin and are widely read," Mr. Iyengar says. There are a large number of yoga schools across 57 cities in 17 provinces across China, all inspired by his books *Light on Yoga* and *Light on Pranayama*.

He believes that yoga's popularity stems from his methodology—its practical approach and in-depth understanding of the relationship between the body and the mind. "The growth of the body is the culture of the mind," Mr. Iyengar says. "It is the culture of intelligence itself. Therefore there are no barriers." He believes that now, as his students move from the "world of materialism to the shores of emancipation," it is time to look inward. "I want my countrymen to carry the light of yoga to our own people in the villages and lift them to general health and happiness. They represent the roots of our Indian culture, untouched by external influences", he says.

### The Bellur Initiative

It was this desire to give back to his society and his home that propelled Mr. Iyengar toward Bellur—a tiny village, 40 kilometers from Bangalore and his birthplace. After all, this village is the B in B.K.S. Iyengar's name. Bellur used to be a poor village—there were no schools, hospitals, or even clean drinking water. Having missed out on a formal education himself, Mr. Iyengar valued it the most. Determined to bring change, he and his pupils organized yoga demonstrations in England and Switzerland, raising a total of \$1,500. Bellur's first elementary school, Sri Krishnamachar-Seshamma Vidyamandir was built in 1967–68. Venkataswamy and Krishnappa, the chairpersons of the village panchayat, the local governing body, have since watched their



China has embraced the Iyengar method of yoga. B.K.S. Iyengar's 2011 master classes met with great response.



B.K.S. Iyengar is a tough taskmaster. He monitors the yoga instructors in the medical class, helping them work with the students to ensure accurate postures for maximum benefit.

*“Guruji loves the children and is really attached to them.”*

home transform. They remember the launch of the school and watched the building come up. “It was the first of its kind in the entire region—a school with a roof. We had never seen anything like this. The villagers were excited at this new opportunity, and soon flocked to the school. There were 200 children initially. Guruji (Mr. Iyengar) got the building extended to accommodate more students,” Krishnappa says.

In January 2005, the foundation stone of the Smt Ramaamani Sundararaja Iyengar High School was laid, and classes started in June the same year. Iyengar sat through the interviews of the children and teachers on the first day of admissions. Then, two years ago, the Smt Ramaamani Sundararaja Iyengar College opened its doors to the people.

### Delivering education

Change has come to Bellur. Today, the village that has a population of 4,000 people includes Ramaamani Nagar, as the adjoining area is now called, which is home to the high school, college, and the hospital. Every morning, the musical chant of Sanskrit *shlokas* (prayers) rings out across the village. The 320 school and 160 college students then troop into a sports field nearby where they work on their yoga postures. Some of the students work on intricate asanas—they are the best of the group who also participate in competitions.

Venkataswamy remembers how Mr. Iyengar showered the schoolchildren with candy every time he visited the village. “Guruji loves the children and is really attached to them. Our village is on the way to Tirupati, the holy shrine of Lord Venkateswara. Guruji would visit our village and always bring candy from Tirupati for the children,” he says.

Mr. Iyengar has taken care of every aspect of a child’s education. He is sensitive to the fact that most of the students come from financially poor backgrounds and travel by their own means from 13 surrounding villages. The school even provides them with a free midday meal that comes all the way from Bangalore. It is obvious that the school and college have increased the opportunities for the children. Krishnappa says,

It is easy to see the vast impact B.K.S. Iyengar and his approach to yoga has had in the world, whether it is in the tiny village of Bellur or at the Institute in Pune.







(right) B.K.S. Iyengar initiated a midday meal project for students at the schools in Bellur.



School students in Bellur working on their yoga postures during their daily practice.



Mr. Iyengar was behind the world's first Sage Patanjali temple, built in Bellur.



Education has increased opportunities for the people of Mr. Iyengar's birthplace, Bellur.

"The foundation of education has changed our village dramatically. The younger generation has taken up yoga. The students who have graduated from our school have done really well. They work in banks, are lawyers, and there are some who even hold doctorates."

### Trust in the future

But education is just one step. The primary concern was to create an infrastructure in the village that would improve quality of life. The Bellur Krishnamachar & Seshamma Smaraka Niddhi Trust (BKSSNT) was formed with this very vision in 2003. The intention was to bring about a silent revolution, since Mr. Iyengar believes that good health and education form a firm foundation for social and economic reform.

One of the Trust's first tasks was to locate pure ground water. Today, a water storage tank with the capacity of 50,000 gallons supplies the village with clean drinking water. A rainwater harvesting initiative was also set up. A malaria epidemic in 1920 and the lack of timely and easily available medical facilities made Mr. Iyengar determined to set up primary health care in the village. The Smt. Ramaamani Sundararaja Iyengar Primary Health Center started in 2007 and treats over 30 villages across the region. So far, more than 18,500 patients from Bellur and the surrounding villages have benefited from the free medical services that the hospital offers. It has 20 beds and the management is now hoping to gain support from more established hospitals. So far, the hospital has two doctors, six nurses, and a lab assistant. The hospital runs a fully equipped daycare service. Medical services, surgical procedures, and medication are free for the village.

Bellur has also become a mecca for Iyengar yoga students. They visit the village for workshops, or on a pilgrimage to see the birthplace of the man who has changed their lives. On the way, they pay their respects at the village temple complex. It is here that Mr. Iyengar has built the world's first Sage Patanjali temple to honor the man who wrote the Yoga Sutras. The trust was also responsible for the renovation of an 800-year-old Hanuman temple and the restoration of a temple dedicated to Lord Ramaa and Rishi Valmiki. Valmiki was the author of the epic Ramaayana transformed from a fierce bandit to a learned Sage. It is significant that the local villagers worship Valmiki; they too have