Dear Members,

Four years ago, I joined the IYASE board as a member at large. When my good friend and board member Jann Boyer asked me to join the IYASE Board in 2014, I told her that I was not a good choice. I proceeded to list all the reasons why I would be a terrible board member. Despite my litany of reasons, Jann stood beside me and I was voted on the board. Now, four years in, I am finishing my two-year term as President, the last position I expected to hold. I am grateful that I am allowed to be pushy and opinionated with my board and would like to thank them for their energy, support, and hard work.

We have really made some big changes over the last four years. My goal on the board has been simple. For 15 years as a practitioner, the closest teacher was five hours away and I had no Iyengar Yoga community. I knew that I was not the only one in this predicament. We need to bring our community to our members, especially those who live in areas without teachers. In my tenure, we created a YouTube channel to showcase our regional teachers; in addition, we produced over thirteen monthly practice plans to give to our members. We now have a fully functional website which has more options to interact with other yogis, download forms, and find resources than ever before.

Our newsletters continue to inform, highlight, and educate the IYASE community, bringing regional news and information to our members far and wide. We kick-started a Membership Outreach program (Iyengar MORE), and since I have been on the board we have kept a consistent social media presence. We now offer more variety in continuing education; we provide mentoring opportunities with our senior teachers in the trainings; and, we have streamlined the registration process to online registration (four years ago we still asked participants to mail checks and paper applications). Hosting a national convention and subsequently seeing a surge in membership gave us the impetus to continue to keep our members engaged by offering them benefits and reasons to continue to be involved with IYASE. I think we have come a long way but we still strive to do more.

I believe in service. Karma yoga (the path of action and service) has always been the road I walked on. It was the reason I became a teacher and it is the reason I have served on our board. I’d like to think I was able to effect change in a small way to help you feel more a part of this large community and to spread the message of Iyengar Yoga farther, wider, and louder. I hand over the reins to Leanne Roque, your new president, in January 2018.

As for me, I will be on my mat, thinking of you, my community far and wide. I hope you will consider volunteering to be on the board in the future. We need your ideas, energy and skills. The term is only three years now, which makes volunteering even more attractive to members, like myself, who need a little help from their friends (thank you, Jann) to get involved.

Namaste,
Lisa

Lisa Waas is an Intermediate Junior 1 teacher and lives in Fernandina Beach, FL. She is the director of Community Yoga + Wellness and owns Iyengar Yoga North Florida.
Geeta’s One-Legged Tadasana

By Laurel Thomas Laulkar

“Do you know you do not stand on your right leg?” the straight forward voice of my teacher, Geeta S. Iyengar, asserted/questioned! I was left quizzical. My thoraco-lumbar spine is strongly shifted to the right due to scoliosis, a curve of the spine. Furthermore, I was told I place more weight on my right foot—I had hard data to back this up! What on earth was she talking about? “Go, get two straps!” Geeta exclaimed.

This pose, while introduced at the grille, can be practiced at a rope wall with two ropes, or with a strap at a door (door at 45 degree angle, strap around the door knob, top hand extended up the edge of the door). The following instructions will be at a rope wall. I’ll instruct you as Geeta instructed me.

One-legged Tadasana: From a rope wall, place the right leg inside the rope, and turn so the right side of your body is facing the wall. Stand in Tadasana. Grasp the top rope with a fully extended right arm. Place the left hand on the hip, fingers forward, thumb back. Adjust the distance away from the wall until there is strong resistance between the right upper inner thigh and the outer right thigh. Keep the rope taut.

Internally rotate the left upper thigh, as it is swept directly out to the side, hovering above the floor. Press the inner right heel into the floor, and extend the lifted inner left heel towards the floor—without touching—releasing the entire left side of the body towards the floor. As you press the inner-right-heel into the floor, lift from the inner calf to the inner groin, extend the spine through crown of head.

Briefly, look down the front chest, adjusting the shoulder blades into the back-body until both sides of the chest are even. Look forward, while moving both deltoids back. See that the chest maintains circularization (trapezium down, shoulder blades in, sides of the chest forward, sternum up). Re-extend the inner leg and spine from the press of the inner-heel. Maintain for 1 minute. Release, and repeat on the other side.

Repeat the pose on both sides. Determine how the outer hip and thigh relate on each side. Note if there is any disparity between them. If one outer hip is requiring a lot more work, then there is a case to stay in the pose longer on that side. Work both sides up to three minutes. Even if you do not have scoliosis, like me, one leg may be working differently from the other!

This pose can dramatically alter the center of gravity. While the weight is re-distributed from the front ball of one foot, it will come towards the back heel.

To answer Geeta’s question, I was standing on the outer hip and ligament. Tadasana, done in this way, lines the femur so that weight is borne on the bones of the right leg.

Which leg would Geeta ask you to discern if you are standing on it?

Laurel Thomas Laulkar studied for five years at RIYMI in Pune, where she received her teaching certificate from B.K.S. Iyengar 2009. Laurel specializes in teaching Yoga for Scoliosis, and works closely with Gloria Goldberg and Elise Miller.
My Life in Two Worlds: Reflections of a Christian Yogi

By Samuel Cooper

Most universes created by the human mind are binary universes. In these universes, every component is either this or not this, that or not that. These universes serve us well when we need to differentiate, but they can also distort.

So it is with Patanjali’s yoga and Christian faith. Many Christians, in ignorance, view yoga as something foreign and even alien to their faith. Many sadhakas see Christian faith as contributing to the mess they hope to transcend.

I recently retired after 41 years as a Christian (Presbyterian) pastor. About ten years ago I took up the practice of yoga. Two years ago, I became a CIYT and now teach in Beaufort, S.C. Some of my Christian friends have puzzled over this seeming inconsistency and a few worry that I may be a heretic. Meanwhile, many of my yogi friends puzzle over the same duality and dig a hole in their scalp trying to figure out how I could be both.

For me, there is no inconsistency, only complementarity.

It hasn’t always been this way. When I first took up the practice of yoga, I was concerned about where the path would lead. Within the first couple of years I studied the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali in four different translations and read the Bhagavad Gita three times in two different translations. I even made a pilgrimage to India to learn about yoga at its source. There, in Pondicherry, I met Bidyadhar Kar and was introduced to Iyengar Yoga. I had experienced nothing like this. His instruction was clear and sharp. If my body didn’t move when he spoke, he moved it. Stern and demanding in an asana, he was friendly and encouraging as we moved to the next posture. I was hooked. I subsequently found my yoga home in the wonderful Iyengar community in Nashville, Tennessee.

Unlike most of the students who walk into our classes seeking to improve their physical condition in one way or the other, my primary concern has been for improvement in the more subtle koshas. As my practice has taken root, I am profoundly grateful to Yogacharya B.K.S. Iyengar for teaching me how I can use the asanas to access a level of consciousness that has both enlightened and strengthened my faith.

Don’t get me wrong. I feel neither particularly enlightened nor spiritual while grunting and flailing around in Virabhadrasana III. But even in a few years, the practice has been chiseling at my body, chiseling at my mind, and chiseling at my consciousness.

The trailer for the documentary “Sadhaka: the Yoga of B.K.S. Iyengar” by Jake Clennell (www.sadhakafilm.com/trailer.html) uses the metaphor and the words of a sculptor to introduce the film, and the yoga of B.K.S. Iyengar. The narrator tells us that “The nature of a stone is that it is strong. To transform it into a sculpture and see the God within it requires immense strength. If one gives up or is daunted by the strength of the stone or injuries the sculpture will never come to life.”

So it has been with my yoga practice. I came to the practice in the midst of what I whimsically referred to as “bhakti burnout.” I had spent more than 50 years in devotion to Jesus. As love sometimes goes, the experience had become cold and lifeless. My spiritual practices were mostly intellectual acts, spiced by the occasional emotional flourish, but always overlooking (“looking over”) my body.

Because Mr. Iyengar pioneered the experience of asana as a doorway into the treasure trove of the yoga described by Patanjali, I was able to take up a path that has begun to transform my nature in a way that had been previously impossible.

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In 2000, I began participating in yoga classes at the office where I worked in Houston. My goal was simple: try anything that might relieve my repetitive strain injuries and my perpetually aching neck and shoulder muscles—the typical desk-worker, computer-user complaints. By sheer luck, the teacher at the office was trained in Iyengar yoga, passing her Introductory I and II assessments during that time. (My first clue that Iyengar training was “something different” was the effort she put into it over a long period of time, and her joy and relief on achieving certification. And I thought she was perfect already!)

After 2-3 years of sporadic practice, I was introduced to Sirsasana. And it was easy! Of course my teachers had prepared me with many standing poses and much time in shoulder stand, but I did not fully appreciate that at the time. I was just incredibly pleased that I could stand on my head. My teacher’s attitude was “of course you can,” and by the way, when are you going to unglue yourself from the wall? In a memorable workshop at Feathered Pipe Ranch in 2005, I finally did!

Fast forward to 2008, and through retirement from my primary career as a geologist, a complete recovery from the repetitive strain injuries, a herniated disk and slow recovery from fierce sciatica, and a traumatic injury to the left sacro-iliac joint. Through all that, yoga was my therapy and an increasing source of interest, and I began teaching yoga in 2005. In 2008, my husband and I relocated from Texas to South Carolina.

Moving is rough, physically challenging work. Not long after the move, my left-side sciatica reappeared. Then there was something new: a tingling, quivering sensation in the left side of the neck and left upper trapezius in Adho Mukha Svanasana and in Sirsasana. Practicing Sirsasana in the middle of my half-unpacked yoga room one day, I tipped over and rolled out on the left side of my neck, trying to avoid a pile of boxes. Now my neck hurt, as well. Meanwhile, I was fast learning how much I missed the Iyengar teachers in Houston and Dallas. I felt completely on my own—without the observation and instruction I had taken for granted there.

It took over a year to figure out that I had developed mild scoliosis: a right thoraco-lumbar scoliosis with a compensating curve in the upper thoracic spine, ending with my neck go-
ing off to the right. During that time, my Sirsasana practice was restricted to hanging from ropes or going up with shoulders supported on two chairs. One teacher introduced me to neck traction on the ropes. Another taught me to do Chatush Padasana on the stairs, with my trunk at the top of the stairs, and head and neck releasing down over the adjacent step down. At a workshop, I asked the instructor if he thought I would ever be able to practice Sirsasana again. His answer: “of course you will.” He was surprised I was in doubt, and related an example of a teacher who had recovered from a more severe condition than mine. Meanwhile, my mentor gritted his teeth and kept pointing out my crookedness, recommending that I practice with a mirror, and correcting me over and over.

I did get over the sciatica. My neck eventually stopped hurting (although it’s still crooked). Slowly, step by step, I rebuilt Sirsasana. I got instant feedback from my neck when I was not centered and balanced over the crown of the head. I learned how to keep adjusting – e.g. shoulders up, outer wrists down, buttocks up, thighs back – until the tingling went away. If I couldn’t fix it, I came out of the pose. I was taught a version with a strap on the elbows, hands on either side of a block, and shoulder blades braced by another block, to provide rectangular, even surfaces for reference. My Sirsasana grew straighter and stronger, but I stayed near the wall. I did not need the wall for balance; I needed it for insurance, to remove the risk of rolling out again on the left side of my neck. Fortunately, the syllabus for Introductory II called for Sirsasana at the wall. In 2011, I passed assessment and became a certified teacher. All was well.

Fast forward to 2013-14. We had moved again in 2012, another physically challenging time. I began to feel discomfort in the left side of the pelvis in asymmetrical poses such as Supta Padangusthasana with the left leg up, or in closed twists into the left leg, and in forward bends. I self-diagnosed instability in the left SI joint, probably related to the traumatic injury several years before, and to the imbalances of scoliosis. I did more abdominal poses and backbends of all types. To my relief, inversions were fine, including Sirsasana.

Until suddenly it wasn’t fine, and I began to experience sciatica when going up and down from Sirsasana. By spring of 2015, I had only a short list of poses I could do without pain. Again I stopped practicing Sirsasana. Teachers helped me develop a more precise mental image of the “derangement” in the left SI joint. An example of this came up while practicing Ardha Matsyendrasana in a workshop. With the left knee up and twisting to the left, the SI joint hurt. The instructor suggested spreading my left buttock to the left. That hurt more. Then she suggested turning the left side of the sacrum back towards the wall behind me. That helped! From this, and with further experimentation, it seemed clear that in my case, the left side of the sacrum tended to pull forward relative to the ilium. This mental image enabled me to better adjust myself in poses.

I was keeping up my practice (ex-Sirsasana) and teaching, but the ligaments were still loose – probably torn and irritated. I needed medical help, and found it through prolotherapy. I won’t go into detail; suffice it to say that a brilliant physician in Charleston confirmed my self-diagnosis, added some details, and recommended a series of three injections to promote inflammation in the affected ligaments and prompt them to heal. The procedure is considered experimental and is not covered by insurance. There was immediate improvement in stability after the first injection, which continued

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to improve through the completion of the series in late 2015, and more slowly, through 2016.

Back to Sirsasana. Doggone it, I had to rebuild it again. I practiced hanging on the ropes. I practiced with various block arrangements at the wall. I worked on standing and abdominal poses, as my core strength had deteriorated during this time. And although I did not need the wall to balance, I was never more than a few inches away from it. I was simply grateful to be practicing Sirsasana again, and it seemed to me the risk (of rolling out in an unbalanced way) was greater than the reward of practicing in the middle of the room.

In May of 2016, at the wonderful IYNAUS convention, I explained my risk-versus-reward calculation to a fellow teacher, and asked if she thought there was significant benefit to moving away from the wall. She said yes. She did not explain, but she said it with confidence. My first try at this was at the convention – and I stayed up and did not crash into anyone. Now I once again practice regularly in the middle of the room.

Is that the end of the story? Hardly. It’s an ongoing journey. At a recent workshop the instructor had us practice Sirsasana prep. As we lifted the knees and walked in, keeping the head off the floor, she asked us to press the outer wrists down and watch the reaction – an engagement or contraction—in the biceps. My right bicep behaved as predicted. The left bicep did nothing. So now I have another interesting path to explore. A different instructor, teaching a class in North Carolina where my husband and I were vacationing, quoted something he had picked up in India: “The sins of Tadasana are magnified in Sirsasana.” Turning that around, the effects of imbalances in Sirsasana— which are immediate and obvious—teach me about imbalances in other poses and in daily life, where the effects are more subtle, but no less significant. So I’m still a bit of a mess, but I keep trying and learning.

Throughout this journey, the teachings and writings of the iyengars have been my constant resource. As well, I owe many Iyengar Yoga teachers for their suggestions, corrections, frustration, and in the end, always support.

Jann Boyer is a CIYT at the Introductory II level. She worked as a geologist for 30 years, studying earth systems before turning her attention to human systems. She teaches regularly in Hilton Head Island, SC, and occasionally in Savannah, GA. During 2013-2016 she served on the Board of Directors of the Iyengar Yoga Association South East (IYASE).

Philosophy Corner, cont. from pg. 3

Strangely for some, I never abandoned my love for Jesus; rather I found it enlivened instead.

Honesty, I don’t know how this works. These two universes are built on philosophical systems so different that any meaningful conversation between the two is thin and the connections facile. Any attempt to create a synthesis would be rather like trying to create a third creature out of a cat and a dog. Failing to get the two to breed, the willful breeder kills both and sews together whiskers and paws, teeth and claws, into a lifeless, non-sensical beast. I have no interest in such a venture.

Like a boatsman with one foot on the dock and the other on a departing vessel, some may argue that I need to make a choice unless I am prepared to take a swim. Others may argue that to go along with no exclusive commitment to one or the other, I am condemning myself to a life of unmoored superficiality. One of my Christian mentors, a master teacher, had a jar on a high shelf in her classroom. Whenever the class wrestled each which way ‘till Sunday on a vexing theological problem, she would reach for the jar, scribble the nature of the dilemma on a piece of paper, and say, “Let’s put that in the jar.” It wasn’t a sign of surrender; rather it was an affirmation that life’s largest mysteries are rooted in the Mystery in which we all exist; it may someday make sense, if making sense ultimately means anything.

Though I don’t understand how it works, I know that it does. I don’t understand how water quenches my thirst, I just know that it does and that is enough for me to drink. So, I keep believing and practicing. Not so long ago, I was a burnt out Jesus bhakta, imprisoned by the symptoms of type II bipolar disorder and the medications to treat them. Now, I am able to love Jesus and experience the joy of practice even as I hear the ring of the hammer striking the chisel and feel its quickening stab pitching the unwanted stone away.

It is a beautiful thing.

Before I was certified to teach, I
assembled a few volunteers from church, dubbed them my “yoga guinea pigs,” and used them in an attempt to carve myself into some kind of teacher by offering yoga instruction in my home. Once certified, I began to teach them at the church. Some stayed with me until I retired and moved. Others came and went. In most ways they are no different from the students we encounter in our studios.

For many of them, though, this was a safe place to explore the exotic and hip thing called yoga. Some Christians (not all, by any means) who walk into yoga studios find them jarring, confusing, off-putting—even disturbing. Amid the small pantheon of Hindu gods they encounter, they find no familiar Christian symbols. If yoga isn’t a religion, what is with all these idols? What is this “Invocation to Patanjali” they have heard about? Is he a god? If he isn’t a god, then why are you praying to him?

I avoid these questions to the extent to which I am able because I don’t have an answer (not a short one, anyway) that they will find satisfying. I only want them to experience the kind of transformation that I know is possible. So I begin class sitting in silence, omitting the AUM that is more likely to cause disturbances than to calm them.

There is a benefit to teaching yoga at church. For “church yogis,” spiritual and theological concerns are closer to the surface so it is a bit easier to get beyond the third limb. Occasionally, they expect “holy yoga” or some such. Sometimes, I use these teaching moments to describe the eight limbs or to introduce the yamas and niyamas.

Once when asked by a student: “What kind of yoga is this?” I told them a little about Guruji and his method. It must have inspired some internet research on the part of one of my students because the next morning I got an email with a question: “Ishvara pranidhana! Will this help me love God more?”

“Maybe, but for now your work is in the opposite direction,” I answered.

Patajanjali begins the “Sadhana Pada” by collectively describing tapas, svadhyaya, and Ishvara pranidhana as kriya yoga or, as Mr. Iyengar translates, “the acts of yoga” (II.1., my emphasis). This is where “the rubber hits the road” and when I decided to have a sutra inscribed onto my practice mat, this is the one I chose. It requires hard work and sacrifice. Sometimes it hurts. It demands inquisitiveness and an open mind. For me, devoting the practice to God is what seals the deal.

At the risk of adding life to a cliché, I affirm that yoga is not a religion (Thank God! We don’t need any more of those!), but it is a spiritual practice. Whether we call it Purusha, or Atman, or the Imago Dei, there comes a cry from within for liberation. As Guruji says, “I want that each and every cell should ring the bell of the divinity.”

According to a Sufi story, there was once a prisoner who yearned for freedom. One day, the prophet Muhammad appeared to him, gave him a set of keys to his cell, saying, “Allah has set you free.” The prisoner took the keys, mounted them on the wall, and prayed to them five times a day.

As far as I am concerned, Guruji has taken the keys off my wall, wrapped my fingers around them, and guided my hand as I have placed the key in the lock.

Next time I am in India, I hope to meet Father Joe Periera. Known for his work with alcoholics, addicts, and those with HIV/AIDS, Father Joe became a student of Mr. Iyengar in the 1960s and is featured in Jake Clennel’s documentary.

“What is contemplative prayer?” he asks. “I think there is no better contemplative prayer than Iyengar yoga,” he answers himself, punctuating his answer with one of those laughs that initiates itself from the toenails. “Absolutely!” Absolutely.

Sam recently retired after 41 years as a Presbyterian pastor and lives in Beaufort, S.C., with his wife, Lily. He began practicing Iyengar yoga eight years ago and was certified to teach in 2015. When not practicing or teaching yoga, he enjoys riding his motorcycle, spending time on the water, and walking his dog, Six Eight.
My Journey to India
By Mary Rotscher

Editors’ note: In July 2017, Mary Rotscher traveled to Pune to study at RIYMI, thanks to her IYASE scholarship. This picture and Mary’s memoir is her way of reciprocating our gift.

After two years of planning, and 20 hours of traveling, I arrived at RIYMI, tired but excited. For years I have listened to stories about the Institute. RIYMI has a superb team of great teachers and they complement each other. They all had the great fortune of studying for many years with Guruji, Geeta and Prashant.

My typical day consisted of observing an early morning class, taking a class, and then practicing in the hall. After lunch I would observe the Medical class or a regular class. Then I would have a light dinner, followed by bedtime.

I am so grateful for the IYASE scholarship and this opportunity to study at RIYMI. If you have never been to RIYMI, it is a very unique experience. The amount of knowledge that is selflessly shared by the Indian teachers is outstanding. They give and give, and hope that we receive it.

Experiencing an immersion of a whole month of yoga at the source, with the Iyengar family and the RIYMI teachers, had a deep, transformative impact on my personal practice. I came back from India feeling strong, and gained a deeper commitment to my own study. I, too, have a strong desire to share my love and respect for the Iyengar tradition with my students.

There is a simplicity in the teaching in India that has made me rethink my own approach as a teacher, and value the importance of naturalness of movement and the joy in practice.

Mary Rotscher is certified at the Introductory 2 level. Her main training is with Mary Dunn, Rebecca Lerner and Dean Lerner. She has studied in India twice.

Iyengar Yoga Association of Southeast Mission

IYASE has four aims:

Communication: Share information about Iyengar Yoga and news in the Iyengar Yoga community: Distribute newsletters two or more times a year to members; maintain the website; send E-bulletins 10-12 times a year.

Continuing Education: Provide one or more Continuing Education Workshops per year with senior Iyengar instructors and announce local Iyengar workshops by member teachers.

Scholarship: Distribute awards to teachers and students to help with expenses for (1) IYASE sponsored workshops; (2) teacher certification; and (3) study at RIYMI in India.

Service: Maintain the Lotus Fellowship Fund to provide immediate financial assistance to members in times of serious need.
Workshops & Events

Workshop with Mary Reilly at the Yoga Institute of Broward
December 8-10, 2017
Cooper City, Florida
www.yogabroward.com
ruthann@yogabroward.com
(954) 452-4424

Four Weekend Teacher Training with Randy Just
Begins January 19, 2018
Audubon Yoga, New Orleans
www.audubonyoga.com
Becky@AudubonYoga.com
(504) 914-3999

Weekend Intensive with Colleen Gallagher
January 26-28, 2018
Namaste Yoga
Tallahassee, Florida
juliadehoff@yahoo.com
(850) 284-7286

Intermediate Intensive with Kevin Gardiner
February 23-25, 2018
Hallandale Beach, Florida
www.yogarosa.com
yogarosa@msn.com
(954) 456-6077

Randy Just Weekend Teacher Training
April 13-15, 2018
Jackson, Mississippi
www.studiomyogaoafms.com
nicholebakeryoga@gmail.com
(601) 209-6325

Future Articles: If you have information that you would like included in future newsletters, please send an E-mail to Newsletter Chair, newsletter@iyase.org.

Renew Your Membership: We encourage all members – teachers and general members – to renew at IYNAUS.org. If you have questions contact Membership@IYASE.org.

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