PRESIDENT’S LETTER

Dear Members,

The promise of a new beginning, a fresh start and a different perspective always accompanies me at the end of the year. Next year seems ripe with possibility and community and I am excited to be part of the IYASE Board as the year unfolds. This year, 2016, was busy for IYASE and we accomplished much over the last 12 months. We launched new programs and tightened up our by-laws to bring IYASE into 2017 with a clearer vision of what our Board can do to best assist our membership. One big change is that our membership on the Board is now for a three-year term for any new member. We feel that this will help keep our Board fresh and make it easier for our members to commit to serving the IYASE community.

Our regional teachers are reaching out to our members by providing workshops to underserved communities through the Iyengar Yoga MORE (Membership Outreach and Education) program. Not only are members asking for Iyengar workshops to be held in their towns and cities, but IYASE teachers are asking to go to those areas where there is no Iyengar representation. In September, our workshop in the Orlando area brought 19 yogis to one such workshop to experience Iyengar yoga for the first time. I anticipate that 2017 will see many of these MORE workshops pop up around our region.

Have you seen one of the new home practice plans that IYASE has released? Go to the website where one new practice plan a month (since October) has been lovingly created by our senior teachers and uploaded to the website just for you. All the new functionality with our website (please browse www.iyase.org and see what’s new) is enabling us to take on some fun projects. Look for more information on our new YouTube channel where our teachers will be uploading short instructional videos for the whole world to see. If you are a teacher, make sure you become a part of this great project.

We have three departing Board Members this year. Jann Boyer our current Vice President, Chris O’Brien, our Secretary, and Tay Strauss, our Membership Chair will be leaving. Jann has been a mentor to me over the last year helping me navigate the complexities of being on a non-profit board. Her eye for detail has kept all of us looking better. Chris, our voice of reason and rock steady advisor, helped us stay on course in discussions throughout her term. Tay tackled the membership chair position right when we moved to a new system and not only learned the complex system of membership, but also passed the baton to our new Membership Chair with a seamless transition of duties. All three have tirelessly worked

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Basic Back Care Sequence for a Home Practice
By Aretha McKinney Blevins

This sequence for basic back care has been adapted by Aretha McKinney Blevins from Yoga Rahasya. Aretha reminds us that if we are in acute back pain we are to seek the advice, council, and guidance of a certified Iyengar teacher to familiarize ourselves with how to use props and modify postures before attempting this sequence. We should not attempt to practice this sequence if we are experiencing significant pain.

The goals of this practice are to ease discomfort and pain, and to allow the practitioner to rest and relax. In addition, this sequence strengthens areas of weakness or collapse and corrects misalignments.

Correcting misalignments is a process and can require dedicated, attentive practice over a long period of time under the guidance of a senior Iyengar teacher. Most common back pain that is not the result of a trauma or injury is caused by a misalignment, lack of strength, and asymmetrical postural habits. Correcting these faults can take time and patience. There is no quick fix.

THE SEQUENCE:

Bent Leg Savasana: Start your practice by resting the back in bent leg Savasana. Rest with your calves on a chair for 3-4 minutes. (You can place a bolster and sandbags on your shins for additional relief.)

Tadasana: Observe the habits of the feet and learn what that has to say about the hips. Notice if the weight rolls to the outer edge of one foot or if one arch collapses. These small observations have a lot to say about your postural habits. Learning to bear the weight evenly on the foot here and watching what additional adjustments happen in the legs and hips in order to achieve this will tell you a lot in this pose and all poses to come. If you have questions about your observations, seek the guidance of a Certified Iyengar Yoga Teacher.

Supta Tadasana with feet at the wall. If the back of the neck feels short and the chin juts upwards, place a blanket under the head so that the throat is soft and neck is relaxed. If the lumbar spine feels tense or short, you might try elevating the heels onto a trifold blanket to encourage more space.

Take arm variations from here as you keep your feet firmly connected to wall. By removing the gravitational pull on the spine and pressure on the vertebra, you can access more space and extensions with the following arm variations. If your hands do not reach the floor, you can place a folded blanket or bolster to support the hands in Utthita Hastasana, Baddanguliyasana, and Urdvha Namaskar, if possible.

Ardha Uttanasana: Place the palms on the back rung of a chair or on the wall at hip height. The goal here is to stretch the hamstrings and side waist and spine. Be sure that the outer heels and little toes are in line and that you are turning the front thighs in to create space and breadth across the lower spinal muscles. When using the palms on the back rest...
Aparigraha during the Holidays
By Doerthe Braun

Aparigraha (without possessions, without belongings, non-acceptance of gifts) is one of the five yamas that I have put the least attention to. My interpretation of aparigraha has been so far: “Enjoy what I have—my car, my house, my ten pair of yoga pants, my daily piece or two of chocolate—and so forth, but don’t be attached to it.” If I make a dent into my car or my favorite yoga pants are worn out, it will not change my true inner Self. Even though my new dress might look nice on me, or as nice as the other twelve in my closet, it does not make me a better person, or better than my neighbor who wears the same shabby dress every day.

With this attitude and ignoring my avidya (ignorance) I was convinced that I had accomplished this yama. Until last year at Christmas time.

The moment I flipped my calendar page from November to December, I immediately became anxious. All the gifts I had to buy! My four children, their classroom teachers, their music teachers, their coaches, my husband, my friends, the cleaning woman—the list goes on. I ran into a store and bought as many items off my list as quickly as possible, filling in the small gaps between teaching yoga and chauffeuring my kids. I shopped so recklessly that often I would buy something in the wrong size or make some other mindless mistake and have to run back to the store, creating extra work, and extra stress. I would use the “free” time in the endless cash register lines to check my e-mail. Heaven forbid I would forget to cook something for my daughter’s school’s potluck the next day, or fail to scrape together some arts and craft gift for my other daughter’s Secret Santa!

As my list got longer, my temper got shorter.

Unfortunately, on my yoga mat my “to-do-to-buy” list started getting more attention than my tensed shoulders, which were by then attached to my ears. I practiced asana like shopping: I was simply taking poses off my list. There was no joy in my beloved Sirsasana. Seemingly out of nowhere, Patanjali blew the whistle and put up a stop sign. I gave up. I sat, just sat. I acknowledged my anger, my frustration, and my complete exhaustion. “Why is there barely any joy present when it comes to the most joyful time of the year?” Then aparigraha came into mind.

I opened Mr. Iyengar’s Light on the Yoga Sutras to Sutra II.39 Aparigrahastairye janmakathamta sambodhah (Knowledge of past and future lives unfolds when one is free from greed for possessions). I asked myself, “Have I really ever read that Sutra?” Mr. Iyengar’s commentary hit me like a firm correction to a sloppy asana: “Aparigraha means not only non-possession and non-acceptance of gifts, but also freedom from rigidity of thought.” My thinking, my emotions, my behavior had become more and more rigid. My desire to please others and make it right for everybody else drew me more and more outwards, bringing me into a rajastic state, away from my inner Self. I was focused on what would happen if I bought a sweater for one of my daughters, but not the other. I decided not to buy a gift for one friend while worrying about what would happen if she got something for me. I built up stories about each thing I bought and each thing I still needed to buy, stories that did not represent the joy of giving.

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Colleen Gallagher’s yoga marga began with a copy of W. Somerset Maugham’s *The Razor’s Edge*. An avid reader, Colleen, age seventeen, was attending an all girls’ Catholic high school in Glendale, California, when she wandered into a musty store where “everything was from India.” Immediately upon entering the shop Colleen’s innermost voice realized, “I’m home.” It was there that Colleen purchased the novel that, in many ways, mirrored her own, young life and set her on her journey to study in India. In Maugham’s novel, a World War I veteran traverses the world looking for meaning before finding the verse from the Upanishads that reads: “The sharp edge of a razor is difficult to pass over; thus the wise say the path to Salvation is hard.” Similarly, by this point in her young life, Colleen and her seven siblings had also traveled down many difficult roads. Due to her father’s work situation, Colleen attended 10 different schools across the country before finishing high school in Connecticut. To finally feel at home somewhere—even in a run-down retail store—was indeed something special.

Initially, it wasn’t the *asana* that attracted Colleen to yoga, but the philosophy. Starting with her Catholic upbringing, Colleen has always been “attracted to spiritual things.” However, like many of us, Colleen began her asana practice after sustaining a serious physical injury. By now in her mid-twenties, divorced, a mother of two, and living in Ft. Myers, Florida, Colleen was hit by a car while out jogging. Having injured her spine in the accident, Colleen could no longer tolerate running. Another book Colleen read while a teenager, *Yoga, Youth, and Reincarnation*, by Jess Stearn, touted *asana* as a cure for neck pain. To alleviate her dire pain, Colleen sought out her first yoga class, which was taught at a local community college. She attended this class for several years before she relocated yet again, this time across the state to Deerfield Beach, Florida. Here, she found a yoga studio where she could take classes. The cost? One dollar each! Colleen’s recalls that “everyone else was 85, while I was 28. But I began to heal.”

Awhile later she heard about “this Iyengar fellow.” Intrigued, Colleen traveled 45 minutes each way to take classes with her first Iyengar teacher, Sue Adams. Like many of us, she quickly became enamored with the system. She purchased *Light on Yoga* and would drive down to Miami to take classes with Bobbi Goldin from time to time. Soon, she was traversing the country to attend workshops with Manouso Manos, and then later also with John Schumacher, and Patricia Walden. Colleen muses: “The teachers were all young. All of us were young. They kicked ass! It was the Wild West.” She sighs, “We have grown old together.”

Colleen recalls first meeting BKS Iyengar in 1990, at the convention in San Diego. It was here, back in California, where Colleen mentioned to Manouso that she wanted some Iyengar teachers to move to Florida. In response, Manouso told Colleen that she was going to have to be-
come “the” teacher in her area: “Out here there is an Iyengar teacher under every bush,” he said. “You are going to have to become a teacher. You will have to do it.” Always a diligent student, Colleen followed Manouso’s instructions. Having had kids while she was but a teenager, Colleen had neither the time nor the means to travel or go to college. Now she had found her life’s path and was willing to go to great lengths to get certified to teach. She is forever grateful for her husband’s support in this vast undertaking. (Colleen was fortunate to meet her current husband while she was a single parent. They have two children together.) To prepare for her first assessment, Colleen regularly flew out to Texas to study with George Purvis. She recalls that at her assessment in Houston, 26 students tested, yet only 12 passed. Because of this experience, which occurred while the Iyengar certification process was still in its infancy, Colleen is a firm believer in having formal Iyengar teacher training programs across the country. In fact, Colleen is an Iyengar Certification Assessor herself, and now she travels all over the country helping students.

It is not surprising that Colleen wants more students to become certified in the Iyengar method. To help this come to fruition, she urges certified teachers to go out into the community to spread the Iyengar method. As we encounter people who may be unfamiliar with this style of yoga we are to remember maitri, and make sure we are teaching the Iyengar method in a cheerful, benevolent way. Above all, Colleen believes that all students must be permitted to “keep their dignity. When you correct people and have people demonstrate poses, don’t make them feel bad.” She credits her teacher, Patricia Walden, for showing her how to be “firm, not mean, not unfriendly.”

Despite the recent passing of Mr. Iyengar, Colleen believes that Iyengar yoga is here to stay. While other methods of yoga come and go, especially “performance yoga,” as Colleen calls it, she wants us to listen to Geeta’s instructions to be true to ourselves. In Colleen’s words, “we might not always be the most popular kid on the block, but we have such a wealth of information to give to others.” When Colleen wanted to reach more people to spread the Iyengar method she started teaching classes at studios that are not focused on the Iyengar method. Colleen loves it when a student she has taught elsewhere walks into the Iyengar studio to take another class with her. After the student returns for three classes she knows, “Yes! I’ve got them!” Colleen laughs: “Going into the community and teaching beginners makes you feel better.”

Colleen offers a few pointers for those of us who may not be used to teaching raw beginners or students who may be unfamiliar with Iyengar Yoga: “Keep them moving around. Keep your instructions simple. You must give them what they can handle, but work them hard. And remember, they don’t see themselves as beginners.”

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 RIMYI in India.

Service: Maintain the Lotus Fellowship Fund to provide immediate financial assistance to members in times of serious need.
of a chair, spread the palms to help increase space in the armpits and upper back and roll the outer armpits down. Do not let the lumbar sink; rather, stretch the outer hips back as you lift the thighs up. If a stool is available, you can build the height of the stool up with bolsters/blankets and take Uttanasana with lumbar spine supported for added space.

**Parsvottanasana** with support:

a) Start facing the wall with the right foot forward at the wall and left foot back. Walk the hands up the wall and work to lift the back ribs up as you stretch the buttocks and outer hips down. This variation will open the back leg calf and offer extension to the spine.

b) Palms on back rung of chair as in Ardha Uttanasana position or on the chair seat. Adjust your distance away from the chair so that your arms can extend fully and your chest is parallel to the floor, if possible. This variation will stretch the forward leg hamstring and offer extension to the spine. Notice the difference between how each leg stretches. When we have gross differences in the tightness of the legs and calves, this can restrict movement in the pelvis and create an environment for back pain. Do each variation several times with shorter holds in order to begin to create freedom.

**Adho Mukha Svanasana** with traction on a singular rope if available. If a rope wall is not available you can take the pose with your hands on top of blocks or on a chair seat (if needed) to gain the full length of the spine. Use support to achieve length and space in the spine.

**Vrksasana** back to wall or **Utthita Marichyasana I** with foot on chair if Vrksasana is not possible. In both poses see that the standing leg is kept firm like Tadasana. Keep the buttocks moving down as you stretch up from the hips. Both of these variations build strength and open the groins. This is especially important if we have a weaker leg or hip or if one groin and hip is bound and tight. In all of the standing postures to come it is important to catch and see the differences side to side and to begin to build strength on the weaker side and to create freedom and extension on the side that feels gripped or bound.

**Utthita Trikonasana, Utthita Parsvakonasana and Ardha Chandrasana.** You can attempt these poses using the wall or a horse/tressler. (If you are at home, a kitchen counter, a table, a stair rail or even the back of a couch can be used like a tressler.) Use your support to access lift and extension in the spine.
a) Put your back to the wall and your hand on top of a brick, or a chair seat, if needed. The wall will help with: a) alignment; b) balance; and c) it will allow you to access more extension and gain space as you can rest against the wall and work to lengthen the spine and open the chest.

b) On a horse/tressler. Try facing the tressler, and also try taking the back to the tressler as they have differing effects on the spine. Use your hands on the support to create added lift and extension. You can slide your hand along the counter or rail to get extension or press down on the support to get needed upward lift.

**Prasarita Padottanasana**: Put your hands on a chair, or walk out with your hands on bricks so that the chest/spine is lengthened forward. See that the outer edges of the feet are parallel so that the back thighs can spread fully.

**Supta Baddha Konasana**: On floor (can take the support of blankets under thighs as needed).

**Seated Baddha Konasana with twist**. Sit on adequate height so that the spine is able to be upright and the legs are able to open. (If your hips are very tight, straddle a chair and do the pose seated). Do not let the groins shrink or the spine collapse as you twist; see that you keep length through the inner legs and that the spine moves in and up as you twist.

**Standing Utthita Marichyasana III**: Place a chair so that the chair seat faces the wall and presses against it or is very near to the wall. Stand to the side of the chair so that the right hip faces the wall. Place your right foot on the chair seat. See that the right thigh is parallel to the hip or slightly higher. (If you are tall you can place a brick under the foot.) Place your left heel up on the support of a brick to get added vertical lift to the spine. See that the left toes point forward and that the outer heel and little toe are more in line so that thigh is encouraged to roll in and the buttock can spread. Turn to face the wall. Use your left hand to outside of the right knee to stabilize and twist.

**Parivrtta Utthita Hasta Padangusthasana** foot supported on stool, counter or support that brings the heel at least to the height of the hip. (If the hamstrings are so tight that this is not possible, repeat the last pose instead.) This pose is very similar to the last pose, however here the upward leg is stretched straight.

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Aretha McKinney Blevins, owner and director of the Iyengar Center of Nashville, began her studies in the Iyengar Tradition in 1996. She has made multiple trips to study with the Iyengars in India and travels regularly to study with senior teachers here in the U.S. She currently studies under the guidance and mentorship of Patricia Walden.
It is like the German Christmas Carol that goes like this: “Every year again comes the Christ Child.” My version is “Every year again come anxiety, stress and exhaustion.”

Instead of packing more stuff into my shopping bags, I decided to carry sutra II.39 with me for awhile, observing and reflecting on my behaviors and thoughts through the glasses of **aparigraha**. It became clear to me that my actions were based on a pattern, which I encountered way more often than the carol about the Christ child. My desires to have more time for my children, to accomplish an advanced asana, to volunteer more at school, to be more patient, and so on, face me every day, every hour. Many would say: “This is how we are, this is our personality.” But seeing it through the lenses of **aparigraha**, I realized that those strong external tendencies cover our True Selves like curtains, bringing us away from who we are and the real reason we have been placed here.

**It became clear to me that my actions were based on a pattern.**

Once, during a teacher training Marla Apt quoted the Dalai Lama, who said: “Our external desires are like a mosquito bite. It is very hard to resist scratching, even though we know the itch will become worse, and more intense. But it is the moment of relief we crave for.” Our **samskaras** (subliminal impressions, patterns) are like itching mosquito bites. It is so tempting to follow our habits, our patterns. But each time we pacify our desires we are increasing the itching bite; and our mind is captured in the duality of “should I scratch or should I not scratch? Should I buy a gift for her, should I not? Should I reward myself with a piece of chocolate or not?” Our mind is covered with bites. Each bite adds another sheath, covering who we truly are. Mr Iyengar states in his commentary: “Perseverance in this austerity leads to knowledge of one’s past and future lives.” If we stop clinging to the desires that arise in our minds, we can get a deeper understanding of our own inherent tendencies and not allow ourselves to be controlled by them. Our desires are fitful and constantly changing as part of **prakriti**. By not being drawn to them we are able to experience our own Real Nature, the **purusha** exists unchanged within us. From this **sattvic** state (state of luminosity) we can experience deep joy, which will infuse our remaining life and lives to come. This is the True gift we should focus on.

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**Doerthe Braun, Intermediate Junior II, was born in Bielefeld, Germany. In 1987, she moved to Switzerland to work as an emergency room nurse. In 1999, she moved to Bethesda, Maryland, where she took her first yoga class. A student of John Schumacher, Doerthe has been teaching at Unity Woods since 2010. She has three daughters and one son.**

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President’s Letter, Continued from front page

on our Board for the last four years providing leadership, support, ideas and energy to help our members. They have helped the Iyengar Yoga Community remain a positive force in the region. Their energy and enthusiasm will be missed.

In the coming months we will be announcing our new slate of Board Members. Keep watching as we continue to bring additional benefits to your IYASE membership and help spread Iyengar Yoga throughout our region. Remember that we are ripe with new ideas!

**Namaste,**

Lisa

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**Lisa Waas**  
**Introductory II**  
Fernandina, FL
**WORKSHOPS 2016 / 2017**

**Dec 16–18**  
Continuing Education Workshop with Suzie Muchnick  
Postures  
Naples, FL  
(239) 566-9642  
info@postures.com  
www.postures.com

**Jan 20–22**  
Teacher Training & General Workshop with Randy Just  
Audubon Yoga  
New Orleans, LA  
(504) 914-3999  
becky@audubonyoga.com  
www.audubonyoga.com

**Jan 27–29**  
Sanskrit Immersion Course with Leslie Freyberg  
Yoga Institute of Broward  
Cooper City, FL  
(954) 452-4424  
ruthann@yogabroward.com  
www.yogabroward.com

**Jan 27–29**  
IYNAUS & Yoga Alliance RYT Teacher Training  
Casey Health  
Gaithersburg, MD  
(301) 355-2030  
iyengarisa@gmail.com  
caseyhealth.org/teacher-training  
**Instructors:** John Schumacher, Kathleen Pringle, Lisa Walford, and Marla Apt

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**SCHOLARSHIP**

*for Study at the Ramamani Iyengar Yoga Memorial Institute*

IYASE will award one $1500 scholarship annually to one of its members in order to support and to ease the expense of travel to India and study at RIMYI.

The requirements are as follows:

- current member in good standing of IYASE
- certified at Introductory level or higher of Iyengar Yoga certification
- confirmation letter indicating acceptance to study at RIMYI for year applying
- financial need
- dedication to the practice of Iyengar yoga
- not a current board member or relative/spouse of IYASE Board member
- letter of recommendation from an Iyengar certified teacher

The deadline for applications is October 15 of the year prior to the applicant’s travel to RIMYI.

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*If you have workshops that you would like included in IYASE newsletters, please submit them through www.iyase.org.*