Dear Center for Iyengar Yoga,

I feel this moment we are living through has changed the foundation of our lives. It feels to me as though “business as usual” is a thing of the past. It has been obliterated in a matter of days. Thus, I assert a new “usual” must be created. Though I am confident this crisis will pass—we will come through it—I feel there are changes to the very fabric of our lives that are being wrought as I write, and as you read. In future writings and contemplations, I am likely to reflect further on this idea of “creating a new usual.” For now, I am considering (and I urge you, dear member of this community, to also reflect), what will we create? What do I wish to create? Though it seems certain that some aspects of our lives, prior to COVID-19, will fall more or less right back into place. Other impacts of this “virus that stopped humankind” will, I expect, take months or years to register.

I am not a sooth-sayer. I am watching closely the situation and filtering through, admittedly, not a great deal of information. My information sources are limited to internet searches and gathered from as diverse an array of sources as I can manage in perhaps sixty to ninety minutes per day. It feels difficult to sort out the reality of the situation. One thing seems obvious, though: the nature of life for we humans has changed, enormously.

I also feel something changing for me regarding my relationship to yoga—particularly the “how” and “why” of its practice. Since my decision (now a mandate) to close the Center, I have watched, with a mixture of admiration and perplexity as a great number of colleagues, peers, teachers, and mentors have gone “virtual” with their classes. I am in awe of their efforts and adaptability, a bit jealous of their technical savvy, and humbled by their seemingly unbroken stride in making their teaching available to their students. Many of you, students at the Center, have suggested or requested that I provide a similar offering. I have been encouraged to do this many times in my career. To be honest, I initially felt a strong urge to do something to keep your classes going. I am grateful to those of you who have made this suggestion and/or offered to support its realization. That day may come, and come very soon. At the same time, I feel it is very important to say the following:

Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev, a modern sage, mystic, and yogi whose discourses I regularly listen to said recently, “Yoga cannot really be taught. It can only be transmitted.” This comment aligned and synchronized with some very strong feelings that, because so much has changed, and is changing, something about what we do and how we do it (and why we do it) at the Center for Iyengar Yoga must change . . . is changing.

Sadhguru also said, “There are times when inaction becomes more significant that action. There are times when, the less you do, the better.” He urged us at this time to sit back, take a good look at our lives, and reflect on where we are going, and where we want to go. His
words resonate deeply within me right now. I feel it is of utmost importance that, in this utter collapse of “business as usual,” a heightened consciousness is brought to bear upon the questions of “what now” and “what next.” Right now, I feel, is an important time to go within to raise consciousness, cultivate awareness, deepen our sensitivity. Right now, I feel is an important time to move deeply into the practice of yoga—one of, if not the, world’s greatest technologies for raising consciousness. I have personal reasons for this: my world has been upended during this time in many profound ways. But I also feel there are much broader and more inclusive reasons for this as well. In essence: if we, as the most influential species on the planet, create new structures and practices—social, environmental, economic—from the same level of consciousness that the previous ones were created from then we are likely to repeat history (though it may not be obvious to us when we do). If we create new structures and practices from a new consciousness, then we have the opportunity to create something much more to our liking (and all other inhabitants of the planet’s as well).

And so, before I roll out the next Iyengar Yoga teaching initiative, or the online platform, for the Center, I am going within to observe and reflect. My goal is to determine, as clearly as possible, what capacity I have to transmit (not teach) yoga. At the same time, I am also inquiring into how to conduct this transmission in the most effective and impactful way—in a way that truly addresses the profound changes our lives are undergoing. I believe that yoga provides solutions for dealing with the challenges and upheavals of life with strength and grace. I believe that yoga is equipped with “technologies” that can empower a person to address and minimize or solve every human affliction. It has been said, “Yoga is a 5,000 year-old [plus] tradition whose classical aim is liberation from suffering in this life.” I feel strongly that this aim is more relevant than ever, and the need for such a tool has never been greater. I feel the time has come for this aim to be realized, “in this life.” Quite frankly, I see no more compelling reason to be on the yogic path. I would lie if I told you I am completely confident about my capacity to fulfill this aim, both as a yoga student as a teacher. Perhaps this is why yoga has been marketed so many other ways—physiotherapy, a great workout, inspiring and motivational activity, rich with photo ops, a great way to justify spending excessive time with goats, etc. To take up its “classical aim” can be daunting indeed. So can a look into the future or our society, economy, civilization, and species right now. So, here’s what you can count on from me: in the coming days, I will be doing my utmost to bring about “liberation from suffering in this life.” Part of that will include discerning ways I can transmit that possibility to others. For those of you to whom this sounds too bold, I ask you, why not aim at the “classical aim?” What do we stand to lose? After all, who among us can say for sure how many more days we have left in this life? In addition to my commitment, I also have a request. It is this:

Dear student, yoga practitioner, seeker, member of the Center for Iyengar Yoga community, please take this time to slow and settle down yourself. Please take this time to do less, and reflect more, if you haven’t already. Yoga practice is so efficient in that way as it
causes one to settle down as it gives one much cause to reflect. With less “to do,” there ought to be much more time for personal growth. If you are inclined to make developing your home yoga practice a part of that personal growth, read on for some ideas and insights intended to support you in that. In addition, I invite you to ask yourself, “What have I wanted to do that I haven’t done because I was too busy, or felt I didn’t have enough time?”, or “Is there some activity I can do that will help soothe, balance, ground, inspire, excite, or fulfill me?” Some ideas I have already heard are: reading more, painting, playing a musical instrument, planting a garden, baking, de-cluttering, phoning a friend I haven’t spoken to in a while, listening to music, listening to the birds. I encourage you to choose activities that foster an inner connection, inner strength, or inner delight.

I am sure that such inner work will empower us to forge a bright new future not only for our practice and study of yoga, but also perhaps for our families, our communities, and even our entire, affliction-gripped humanity. I am sure that, if we are to create a new “business as usual” to replace the old, crumbling one, the creation will come out of deep inner reflection, not frenzied outer activity.

In the meantime, I’d like to make one thing clear. Right now, I don’t feel that online classes are the best means for me to support you in your practice of yoga. I assert that, with the Level I, Level II Home Practice, and Immunity sequences I have emailed you/posted on our website’s home page, coupled with the instruction you have received up to this point as well as the information in books like *Light on Yoga*, *Yoga: A Gem for Women*, and *Yoga the Iyengar Way*, you have all the raw materials you need to culture a very profound and impactful home yoga practice for the next couple of weeks (and far beyond that!). If you but meticulously follow the sequences in these worksheets, implementing as many of the alignment details and refinements as you know to do, for the indicated number of repetitions and/or timings, you will be amazed by what happens within you! If at any time you feel you are ready for more than what the Level II sequences offer, please either contact me or start working on a sequence(s) from the back of *Light on Yoga* (beginning somewhere between weeks 1 and 14), or you can follow the “Introductory” or “Elementary” Course from Geeta Iyengar’s book, *Yoga: A Gem for Women* (see Chapter XI). It is also likely that I will soon be posting additional sequences and practice ideas on our website’s blog. Finally, work has begun to create ways for us to be together, virtually, to develop our practices and empower ourselves to do them with greater skill and efficacy. To that end, I am planning a series of conference calls. The first one will be held this Tuesday (March 24th) at 6:30 p.m.; another will be held Saturday (March 28th), at 9:30 a.m. These calls will aim to inspire you to practice. They will also provide opportunities to clarify any questions and solve any problems you may be having as you practice (or even consider practicing) at home. In addition, we are exploring ways to host video conferences (i.e. virtual sat-sangas) to add a deeper element of connectedness. I
foresee such calls/conferences/sat-sangas occurring on a regular basis until we can come together, in person for classes again at the Center. I’ll say it again: I cannot encourage you strongly enough to develop your yoga practice at this time. In so many ways, the worldwide stoppage represents a golden opportunity to grow spiritually in some very profound ways. I am committed to nurturing this growth by inspiring and empowering you to develop your home practice. Although our movements “without” may be (increasingly?) restricted for a time, no one and nothing but ourselves can limit how far we go within. I am also certain that the fortitude, courage, and resilience you can and will develop by practicing regularly and with intensity will prove priceless in the days (and years) ahead.

Please know that, though I too am going within and “doing less,” I remain ever ready (and eager) to support you in your yogic journey. As such, you can call on my at any time you need assistance, encouragement, clarification, or simply careful listening. I would be grateful for the opportunity to stand by your side.

I send this with much love in my heart and look forward to being together some (NEW) day soon!

Sincerely,
Chris

p.s. Here’s something that was sent to me by a teacher at my son’s school, The Detroit Waldorf School. I do not know who the source is, but I found it very relevant to some thoughts I have shared above. I have taken the liberty of giving it the title, “And the People Healed,” but I also like the feel of “And the People Were Liberated” (I think that will be the revised and expanded version):

“And the people stayed home. And read books, and listened, and rested, and exercised, and made art, and played games, and learned new ways of being, and were still. And listened more deeply. Some meditated, some prayed, some danced. Some met their shadows. And the people began to think differently. And the people healed. And in the absence of people living in ignorant, dangerous, mindless, and heartless ways, the earth began to heal. And when the danger passed, and the people joined together again, they grieved their losses, and made new choices, and dreamed new images, and created new ways to live and heal the earth fully, as they had been healed.”