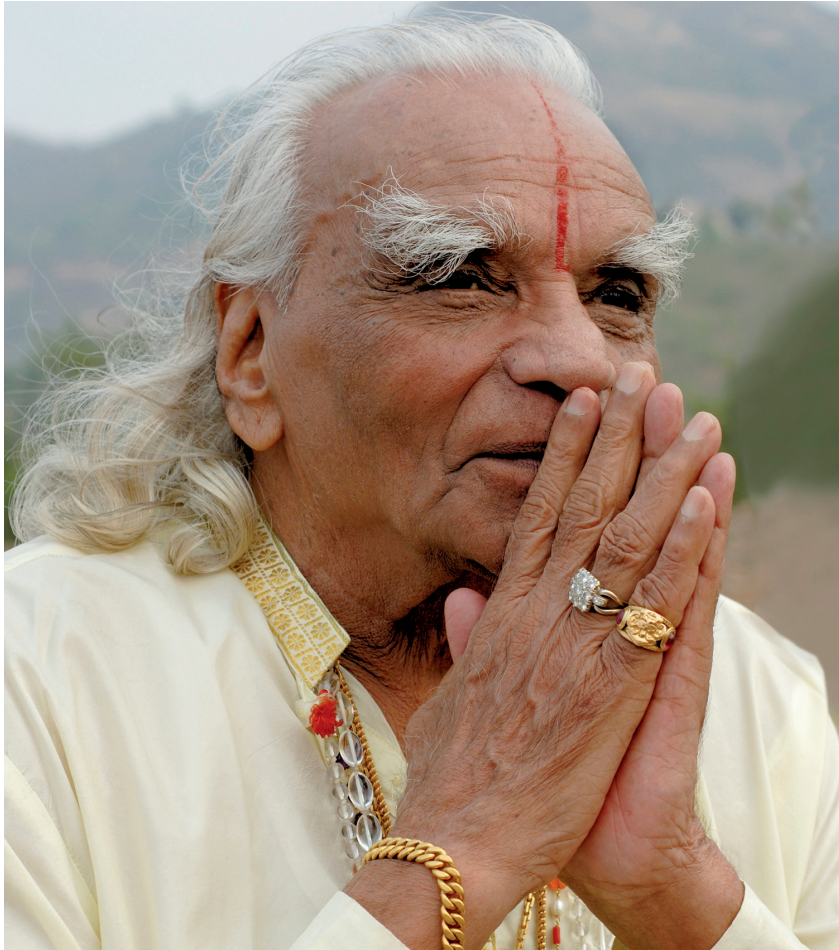


the yj interview

by Diane Anderson



The Namesake

As B. K. S. Iyengar turns 90, he talks candidly about his life and this thing called Iyengar Yoga.

THE GRAND MASTER of modern yoga, B. K. S. Iyengar was born in Belur, India, on December 14, 1918. When he was 14, his brother-in-law, T. Krishnamacharya, introduced him to a yoga practice, which improved his tuberculosis. Iyengar pioneered the use of props to make poses accessible to a wide array of students. He has written a number of books, including *Light on Yôga*, which many practitioners esteem as the bible of yoga. Now living in Pune, India, Iyengar still practices every day.

According to you, what is Iyengar Yoga? I myself do not know [laughs]. People, for convenience's sake, brand my practice as Iyengar Yoga. I just try to get the physical body in line with the mental

body, the mental body with the intellectual body, and the intellectual body with the spiritual body, so they are balanced. Each asana has an optimum line or position. From the head to the foot, from the front to the back, from the right to the left—without deviation, without distortion. Beyond that, I don't think I've done anything. It's just pure traditional yoga, from our ancestors, from our gurus, from Patanjali.

What is your practice like now? Even now, the maximum my body can do, I do. I am 90, and still I practice. I stay in Sirsasana (Headstand) for half an hour, even without shaking. I'm improving still, progressing still. That is why I am still practicing with such energy. The mortal body has its limitations. Therefore, I will still practice 'til the last breath of my life so that I do not become a servant of the mind, but rather the master of the mind. Old age makes a strong man say goodbye. I am breaking the fear complex and living with confidence.

From the perspective of someone turning 90, what do you think is essential for a happy life?

Uniting the energy of the body with the energy of the soul. There is a difference between happiness and delight. Happiness is at the mind level. Delight is beyond the mind. When you see a sunset, you don't see it from the mind. You see it beyond the mind, from beyond yourself—it's an experiencing state. My asana is all beyond the frame of mind, not within the frame of mind. That is delight. Happiness is sensual happiness. But delight is spiritual happiness.

You've devoted your life to teaching yoga. Why?

That question God has to answer, not me. It was not by choice. It's by chance I took it. The chance became a choice. I was suffering from various illnesses, and with yoga I started to get better. I thought, "Let me see what yoga will teach me." It gave me a lot of understanding. I cannot divide myself from my practice; I am the asana, and the asana is me. I have said that I'm retired. I am telling a lie to the public. I'm still teaching at the age of 90. In classes, I adjust students' bodies with my own power. My life and energy are still growing. Because I'm practicing, age has not struck me at all. ■

This interview continues at yogajournal.com/iyengar.

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