

## **“I come from heaven“**

When I first met B.K.S. Iyengar at a congress back in 1986, my life was literally turned on its head. Up until then I entertained a romantic idea about yoga and the reclusive lifestyle of yoga masters. I found myself standing in front of a man who exuded vitality and *joie de vivre*. His watchful eye singled me out, and to my amazement I learned that my spine was “not aligned“. On removing my shirt and baring my back, a murmur of confirmation arose from the group.

In hindsight I realized that this act of revelation was symbolic of Iyengar’s underlying approach. He started with the visible body, and through this he could penetrate through to the invisible. To quote Iyengar himself:

“On yoga’s journey, one has to interpenetrate the subtle and casual bodies via the gross body or body out of action“.

The call of the master had reached me. I quit my medicine studies, which I had just recently embarked on, and started an intensive practice of yoga. B.K.S. Iyengar’s statement that medicine was preoccupied with the dead body, while he was studying the living body through yoga, had struck a chord with me.

In 1989 I stood for the first time on a yoga mat in Pune, India. In the preceding years I had completed my first yoga teacher-training course in Paris. Guruji, as he was affectionately referred to by his students, examined me himself. My body was shaking like a leaf in every position. He remarked that my body was still raw and needed to be “burned“. Subsequently, the *baptism of fire* took place at the Institute in Pune. The atmosphere at the Institute was subdued, as Guriji’s son had just suffered a serious accident. Despite this, Guruji still received us warmly with an offer of Indian chai in the foyer of his apartment block. I had just arrived with two friends from France at the time. It was at times like these, that I experienced him less as the strict teacher, and more as a father-like friend. He could laugh heartily, and we left the Institute in high spirits.

The next morning at 7 o’clock sharp, when Guruji commenced the Hymn to Patanjali, you could feel the room vibrating. Guruji demanded 100% attention and effort from each of his forty students. No-one could hide from his perceptive eye. It seemed as though he was able to detect when students were distracted by their thoughts. I can clearly remember his harsh rebuke of an Indian dancer, who had travelled from Delhi:

“You think you have come a long way, but I have come from heaven to teach you!“

However, in this room everyone was considered equal. The only thing that mattered was a complete devotion to the yoga practice.

## **“The Three Musketeers“**

Sometimes, early in the morning, the path between the brain and the body seems congested. Our brains receive the instruction to bring our heads back in Parivrrta Parsvakonasana, but we have not implemented this in our bodies. On this day in Pune, I felt a sharp slap on the back of the head. All three of us were woken by Guriji’s hand – an unforgettable moment for each of us. From our mutual teacher in Paris, we later learned that Guruji had affectionately referred to us as the three musketeers.

The stern hand and the warm heart of Guruji were always close to each other. His face could change from one expression to another in an instant – from anger, to encouragement, to displeasure. But in the end a roguish smile was always discernable.

Guruji has closed his eyes forever and returned to “the heaven“ from whence he came. He lives on in our hearts as our unforgettable teacher, friend and master.