**A meeting in the RIMYI lobby with BKS Iyengar, November 13, 2013**

By Ann Kilbertus, Louie Ettling, and Linda Shevloff.  

It is November and the three of us are in Pune for 5 weeks, studying at the Ramamani Memorial Yoga Institute.

Pandu, the secretary at RIMYI, suggests that we three Canadians, who have requested a short meeting with Guruji, come to the lobby to meet with him between 4 and 4:30 p.m. on Wednesday.  It seems the lobby is the new library these days since Guruji is no longer going down the many narrow steep steps which access that room.  
  
We wait for forty minutes then decide to leave the lobby and sit in the small courtyard between the Institute and the Iyengar family home. After ten more minutes have passed we conclude he will not be coming and begin to walk toward the shoe rack to collect our footwear. Suddenly we catch a flash of white through the window to a stairwell in the family home. Just as we are willing to let go of the whole idea of a meeting, Guruji appears.  
  
We return our shoes to the rack and quietly retreat to the lobby to see what will occur. Ann speaks with Pandu, who then disappears into an office on the right side of the lobby, then reappears saying, "Yes, yes, just wait. Guruji will come and meet you."  
  
We place three chairs opposite a small desk which is located at the very end of the lobby allowing a vantage point from which to view the comings and goings of one and all. Guruji enters and sits at the desk across from us. After a nod of the head, he says "Yes?"  
  
We launch, proceeding to deliver handwritten letters and gifts from Senior teachers in Canada. Without glasses, he reads each letter in front of us, carefully and in silence. He looks up again.  
  
We slip a large ninety-fifth birthday card out of its big red envelope. It is a colorful pen and ink drawing by Lauren Cox with Guruji's smiling face on the front and his feet on the back. He laughs and really seems to appreciate it. He raises his eyebrows and we say we have certificates for him to sign. He nods and we remove the tightly rolled up certificates from a cardboard tube. He calls an assistant and asks for a special pen. Quietly and efficiently, with the three of us holding down the corners so that they don't curl, he signs nineteen Canadian certificates with a steady hand and a flowing signature. Not a moment wasted.  
  
When he is done we feel it is time to go and prepare to leave. However, Guruji chooses this moment to begin a discourse on practice and aging. Some of this is in relation to the content of the letters which we have delivered to him. We sit upright on the edges of our chairs and listen…

"I am aging...do you think I am not suffering? What do you expect? It is painful. Aging, pain and dying are part of the human condition."  Guruji then mentions the many letters he receives from students asking him for advice. "I have given asanas to cope with different challenges." He emphasizes, however, that he prefers to see these students in person.

"I am not God, but a human being. Our suffering is the karma of our lives. I used to write while on long shaky train rides. It was hard on my eyes, but I did it. With age the retina will become either thick or thin. My doctor recently suggested laser surgery, but I went away and practiced. One month later this surgery was not necessary."  
  
"Fear and doubt come even after many years of practice. You have to have faith in yoga and try gradually. If a cardiac surgeon has a heart attack do you mean to say he doesn't believe in his subject? After an accident, if a person undergoes an amputation, they adapt. They carry on."  
  
"If an older person is experiencing retinal changes, they have to observe and not jump in. For example, if returning to inversions after not doing, take adho mukha svanasana, then paschimottanasana with support. Then try niralamba halasana observing carefully. Again do adho mukha svanasana and paschimottanasana. Don't go suddenly to full inversions. Test your body's responses step by step. I have given teachings about the alignment of the ears in inversions since the eighties. If this alignment isn't observed, damage can be done to the eyes."  
  
Guruji points out that strictly speaking what we understand to be rope sirsasana often has the head more like adho mukha vrksasana. In sirsasana the head is not extended back. In the ropes that could be achieved by supporting the base of the skull.  
  
He then gives us permission to photograph his niralamba sirsasana at the tressler during morning practice. These photos are to accompany a letter which he has written for a particular practitioner.  
  
As Guruji talks with us about the cycles of life he seems calmly accepting. "Birth and death are part of life as is the suffering in between. Interesting that we don't ask how people are born, but want to know how they die. Dying is natural."  
  
"You are doing well. Have faith. Do the work. God bless."

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