**Sadhana (Practice)**

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Two Iyengar yoga teachers in the United States, Elizabeth Sullivan, Marblehead, MA, and Patricia Walden, Boston, MA, both introduced me to Iyengar yoga in 2009. The Iyengar yoga methodology drew me in like a magnet and I wholeheartedly embraced the art, science and philosophy of it.

As I continued learning and practicing Iyengar yoga, I realized there was a strong desire brewing in my heart to visit RIMYI (Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute) in Pune, India. I wanted to meet Guruji, Yogacharya B.K.S. Iyengar. During the summer of 2011, I had my regular visit to India to see my family. While I was there, I communicated with RIMYI officials and sought permission to visit the institute for two days. My main aim was to take the “Darshanam” (to see) of Guruji. I knew I was not eligible yet to take training at RIMYI yet it was still a dream of mine to take training lessons there.

Nonetheless, I was very happy and excited but also nervous to visit RIMYI. I went there that morning, with my heart pounding with excitement. The secretary of the institute allowed me to observe a beginner’s class in the morning and told me to come in the afternoon to meet Guruji at the library.

Promptly, I came back to the institute at 2:30 pm. I waited in the lobby for my turn to visit Guruji. I was not sure what to ask Guruji, my mind was blank. When my turn came, I entered the library with an unsteady gait and throbbing heart. I saw Guruji sitting at the desk. I was stunned to notice the simplicity around him, seated on an ordinary chair at a small table, in a narrow passage of the library. I went and sat reverently at his feet and introduced myself as a student of Patricia Walden and Elizabeth Sullivan from Massachusetts, USA. I prostrated to him and asked for his blessings. He gave me his verbal blessings, but I was not satisfied with that. Even though I was nervous, I requested him to bless me with his hand on my head. By then, I had known that Guruji was no longer teaching, except providing guidance. I had realized that what I had missed in my yogic journey was the sacred touch of his guiding hands. His blessings were therefore all the more important. I wanted to experience the “sattvic” touch of his hands. To my surprise, immediately Guruji placed his hand on my head and pressed it gently and said, “practice, do not give up, practice every day”. His touch made an imprint, not just on my head, but it penetrated deep inside reaching each and every cell in my brain.

The next day I was allowed to watch Guruji’s yoga practice in the hall. I went and sat on the steps of the staircase overlooking the hall. As I turned my gaze towards the hall, I saw Guruji in his back bend on a hanging rope from the ceiling. After some time, some teachers lowered him on to the ground. Everything and everyone was new to me.

I was deeply absorbed in each and every asana that Guruji practiced. I was flabbergasted to see him in Sarvangasana (shoulder stand) and simultaneously giving instructions to his granddaughter Ms. Abhijata, who was practicing Marichyasana III (spinal twist). Once again, he was in one of the supported back bend and at the same time instructing Abhijata who was in her Prasarita Padottanasana ( Wide legged forward bend). People from every corner of the world were there in the hall. Everyone was busy doing an asana, arranging different types of props or hovering over to listen each and every word of Guruji while he was teaching his granddaughter. I was like a child, looking at everyone and everything with bewilderment. Slowly the bewilderment turned into bitterness in my throat and a wave of melancholy swept in. I came to reality, having spent only two years practicing of Iyengar yoga I was not sure whether I would ever get a chance to come here to learn and also get the opportunity to practice along with Guruji. With my physical and mental strength, it was a far-fetched ambition. I tried to drag my mind back to the present because thinking about my future may connect me back to my past.

Most of the time, the future takes you back to past rather than putting one in the present. I wanted to stay in that pristine and serene present moment of watching Guruji’s practice, rather than to get caught in the dream of the future and get lost in the abyss of my past.

Guruji came into Bhujangasana (Cobra pose) and told two teachers to place weights on his lower back. The teachers were reluctant to put so much weight on his back, but he did not budge. He insisted, and finally made them put the desired weight on his lower back. I could not believe my eyes! He stayed in that asana for a good length of time with so much weight. Since I was a beginner in Iyengar yoga, I did not understand many things happening in the practice hall. I am a dreamer. I started dreaming myself practicing in the hall, but the loud noise of Guruji startled me back to the present. Guruji seemed little angry with someone in the hall because the person was not following his instructions properly. But the anger did not last long. He became soft and started explaining. I felt a bit of jealous looking at it, because I did not have that opportunity of learning from Guruji. Suddenly, fear crept in as I imagined myself in front of him performing an asana and not up to the mark and facing his anger. But still my inner self longed for the Guruji’s divine touch on my back as I learn from him.

Finally Guruji came to Savasana. His savasana was quite elaborate. Bolsters and weights were placed on his lower abdomen and upper thighs. He was in that pose for a long time. Once he ended the asana, the weights were removed and he suddenly sat up. He stood up and came in front of Patanjali’s idol and bowed his head to Lord Patanjali and started walking towards the door. Almost everyone else left the hall. I was the only one still sitting on the steps.

It was time for me to come out of this emotional roller coaster. I ran down the steps and I caught up with Guruji right on the first step of the hall. I requested that I would like to do “Namaskara” to him. He stood there silently. I spoke in my mother tongue, “kannada”, which was his mother tongue as well, “Guruji, I am not fortunate enough to learn from you but I am fortunate enough to watch your practice, please bless me”. He gave his charming loud laugh. I was really fortunate to hear and see that laugh. I bowed down and touched his feet with my hands. I press my hands to his feet, and then pressed my hands into my eyes. Guruji said “God bless you”.

Then, we both started descending the steps. I started asking my naïve questions about his daily practice. He told me about his one hour of pranayama in the morning and the three hours of asana practice, which I witnessed. Then I expressed my desire to come back to the institute to learn yoga. He simply said,” practice, practice regularly, God bless you”. I was very happy and at the same time I was little disappointed and sad. He told only one word, “practice”, both times I met him. I wanted him to say something more. My mind was already gone on a roller coaster ride of “Navarasas” (nine emotions) and now caught in a see-saw of dualities, I was unable to realize the truth.

The precious two days in Pune were over and I returned to Bangalore for couple of days and then back to the US. Something had transformed in me. The sacred touch and word of Guruji had brought a change in me. I started going to Patricia’s classes a little more regularly. I started putting two, three and sometimes four hours of yoga practice every day. I started holding Sirsasana and Sarvangasana for seven to eight minutes.

By January 2012, I expressed my desire to go to RIMYI with my Guru, Patricia. She was not sure whether I was ready to go there. Later in April, she changed her mind and agreed to sign my application.

I never believed in miracles, until then, but it happened to me. Everything happened at lightening pace. I was in RIMYI in July 2012 for a three week stay. I got to enroll in intermediate classes and also got the permission to practice in the hall along with Guruji. It was a precious and sacred moment in my life. I did not miss a single day of practice in the hall and listened to the teachings of Guruji, while he was training his granddaughter. Everyday right after my morning class I was there in the hall and I was almost the last student to leave the hall. I did not miss a single day spending time at the library as Guruji was at his desk. It was a great experience and an incredible journey.

By observing his practice and listening to each and every word of his teachings, I learnt a lot about Astanga yoga. The sadness of not learning from him was welled in my heart before coming to RIMYI but it has dissipated slowly and it is now filled with gratitude, respect and humility.

There were only two days left for me before leaving Pune. I wanted to take a picture with Guruji, but I was very scared and nervous to ask him. Somehow I mustered all the courage I had and I asked him when he was sitting alone in the library. He said, “Nobody is here who will take the picture?” I realized my mistake, but after less than a minute, a local student of RIMYI walked in. I requested her to take the video and gave her my camcorder. I was excited and at the same time nervous, as I stood right next to Guruji. Thinking back, I should have sat at his feet in reverence rather than standing right next to him. The video and the photos are an invaluable treasure to me.

Guruji is not here today, but he is always there in my heart and his words in my mind, guiding me through my yogic journey. I have realized and understood the power and meaning of the word “practice” – “Sadhana”! Guruji’s words, “It is my profound hope that my end can be your beginning” echoes in my mind to this day.