YOGA IN FAMILY LIFE

*By,Neelakshi Duwarah,*

*Guwahati, Assam*

Being a woman as it were, with the myriad roles that Society and  Nature demands you play with the ease and  flourish of a seasoned player, is, well , difficult ; to say the least. And to top it, if you are driven to add to it the pursuing of a passion, you’ve set yourself out on a tricky path.  And when the passion turns out to be a philosophy: ‘Yoga’ as in my case, Ah! My acquaintances and family don’t quite know what to expect.

It was in October 2002, in the foothills of Mussorie’s Yog Ganga Centre for Yoga Studies that I was privileged and blessed to be introduced to “Iyengar Yoga” by Rajiv and Swati Chanchani, both devoted students of Guruji, Geetaji and Prashant ji and amazing teachers themselves. I was a young wife and mother of two sons( who were then aged 8 and 6 years) was teaching in a school and it so happened that I lost my voice due to some problem in my vocal chord ...( maybe I had lost my voice figuratively too).. but the grace of Yoga bestowed by Patanjali Muni, Guruji and my living teachers ,gave me a new birth. I understood this was what I was looking for and haven’t looked back ever since.

Yoga became a way of life for me ...and I knew no other way, neither felt the need other than Guruji’s methods. I felt indebted to Guruji , Geetaji , Prashant ji in Pune of whom I had only heard about ( until 2012 ). They seemed physically very far away for me (I was born and brought up in Assam in the far North East of India, learned Yoga in Dehradun in the North and somehow never thought of coming down South-West...)... however by the benevolence of my teachers Rajiv and Swati I ever felt close to Guruji, Geetaji and Prashantji in spirit and was happy to practice their teachings from a distance. Their amazing contributions to Yoga and the compassion for the betterment of the lives of contemporary and suffering human lives around the world made me hold them in reverence and awe. I followed their teachings dedicatedly and read their writings voraciously ... weaving them into my life.

As a pursuer of the yogic path, people close and not so close to me, were and are curious as to how I practice Yoga in my daily life with unasked questions written all over their faces, such as : “Will we be seeing you in flowing hair and flowing robes soon….? Is it possible to practice Yoga and lead a normal family life?.....Such has become the understanding of Yoga to most people, whatever may be the reasons and unfortunately, of my most so called modern , educated , urban fellow Indians.

 Not that one really needs to explain the whys and wherefores of one’s deepest beliefs. However when you follow your heart , sometimes you do yearn for company, if  not for anything , but just to share and savor the beauty of the sights you have the good fortune to behold on the journey when you follow your call. I practiced asanas as much as my schedule allowed, regularly following Guruji’s and Geetaji’s writings. Out of gratefulness, I started my own mission of propagating Guruji’s teachings amongst my family members and acquaintances and whoever else would lend me an ear. I started talking about Guruji : “Look at Yogacharya BKS Iyengar: this legendary being in human embodiment. He has with intense research and dedication introduced pioneering and innovative ways into traditional yog- asanas and rare insights for the practice of Yoga particularly relevant to contemporary lifestyle. He has not only transformed and enlivened his own extremely disadvantaged health and economic conditions but is also internationally renowned and is **very much** **a family man**. He has nurtured 6 children and thousands of Yoga aspirants, besides carrying out his other responsibilities as a member of his family and the society. He is my role model.

I would often quote Guruji:I had read this somewhere...He had said :

*“If I were a sannyasin, I might say you should all become sannyasins and renounce family life to follow a spiritual path. A  sannyasin does not know the householder’s life, so it is easy for him to say, ‘leave your family, divorce and come to me.’ These “days many people who are involved in yoga forget their duties toward their children, or towards their husbands or their wives. This is not a yogic attitude, but the attitude of a fanatic. The yogis of ancient India were householders and reached the zenith while living amidst household activities, surrounded by families and children. As a family man I would say, ‘Why should you abandon your family commitments?’*

*You have to find out your own limitations. That is what yoga teaches: first to know your limitations, then to build from them….”*

Know your self and then know your Self !

I drew strength and courage from this approach of Guruji and was encouraged particularly because he was actually **living** it!

In a patriarchal society, I admit there may be add-on obstacles for women and married women in particular: but obstacles are meant to be overcome and when we are fortunate to have a beacon like Guruji we ought to be ashamed to find excuses.

I thought like this: “ The triad of Guruji’s teachings of **precision** and alignment, **timing ,** **sequencing** alongwith the use of **props**; all these aspects I should be able practice in my daily life situations and my various roles in the family and society. I strove to do with precision whatever activity I was to do, sensitised myself how long and when and what to say or do and to use help and assistance when available and when I needed but not to be dependent on them...whatever I learnt in my asana practice, and tried to make it more of a wholesome practice rather than limiting it just to the physical level. I thought it was okay to wear exquisite *mekhela chadors* (traditional Assamese dress) or salwar suits or western outfits or anything I am comfortable in, enjoy delectable cuisines, socialize ,attend PTMs, buy gold,  visit the parlour and generally carry out all ‘normal’ activities and yet be ***yogic.*** The difference, as I’ve been taught by my Yoga teachers, is that **I should train myself not to miss them when they aren’t there**. It’s a great training. Every time I ask myself whether I can do without any thing /activity/ person which or whom I happen to thoroughly enjoy and I gather an affirmative answer, something inside me says, “Yes, you are on the right track!” It is such an empowering feeling! I feel free!  Each time I get a negative answer though, I realize there’s work to be done.”

This practice may appear far removed from what we students of Iyengar Yoga apparently learn in our regular classes. But I figured that whatever I learnt on the mat in class had to be carried over to my life; my business of daily living and relating to the environment around me. ***The experience of a single state of uninterrupted flow of attention and awareness*** which is I feel is the essence of what the Masters throughout the ages have been trying to tell us so as to realize the true purpose of human existence and which certainly is quite elusive , has been made **‘knowable’** to us by our revered Guruji. He allowed Divinity to flow through him and reach us all. We can hardly fathom how much he has given us: expecting nothing in return except our total dedication to the practice.

I was grateful but happy enough to revere and love Guruji from afar, and to live his teachings in my life, gathering strength from his example that it was possible to practice Yoga and lead a better than normal family life ! I strove to play my roles of a mother, a wife, a daughter, a daughter in law , a friend or whatever call I would get, with the sense of honesty and righteousness that I learnt in my asana practice. Challenges would come relentlessly, disillusionment, loneliness, dejection and pain would try to overpower me, but the practice sustained me. I tried to carry the understanding of the *yamas* and the *niyamas* that he taught us to imbibe in our asana practice to living them out while playing out my various roles in family and society. This was fine till everyone in my family, friends, acquaintances, my household helpers and I enjoyed a harmonious relationship: particularly in guiding my sons with love and support through a stress free adolescence (that’s what **they** say!) However, when these same people began to ask me to tell them what kept me energised, positive and balanced, there emerged the challenge of teaching...this continued for a decade when by Divine Grace , in the month of February,2012,my family and I were privileged and blessed to serve Geetaji, Sunitaji , Parthasarathy ji and Sridhar ji as our guests in Assam. And though visiting Pune or taking up the responsibility of teaching ‘Iyengar’Yoga seemed too high a calling for me, but it appeared like the most natural and the only thing I wanted to do besides the roles doled out by my past karma.

It was as if the Divine blessed me to pay my respects in the physical embodiment to a legend and my revered teachers, And so in July 2012, I made a trip which (I wonder why I had never envisaged before) am eternally grateful for. When I saw the Master for the first time as I entered the RIMYI office, I must say I was thrilled but shocked...I thought how come he is so small! I thought he was a towering personality! How come he is not much taller than me...? (I am 4 ft 11” !!). That was the first reaction... but my mind had not registered wrong impressions, his vibrancy and life force was electrifying, to say the least. I just touched his blessed feet and offered my heartfelt silent prayers. I was privileged to repeat this a few days later on the Guru Purnima day (3rd July 2012) and to offer him a *mithai* on my elder sons 18th birthday on the 10th of July, 2012; to which he smiled and said “God bless you.”

*I couldn’t ask for more....*

And probably because I had not met him very often, that his leaving of the mortal embodiment did not create any void in me. I had always reached out to him in Spirit, maybe that was a blessing and still continue to reach out to him in the same way, tuning in to and trusting the Divine for communication.

To try to live out his principles and teachings in and through my life as a totally and rightfully involved member of the family and society as he has shown, is all that I can offer in my gratefulness to this Divine messenger.

Om Shanti !