



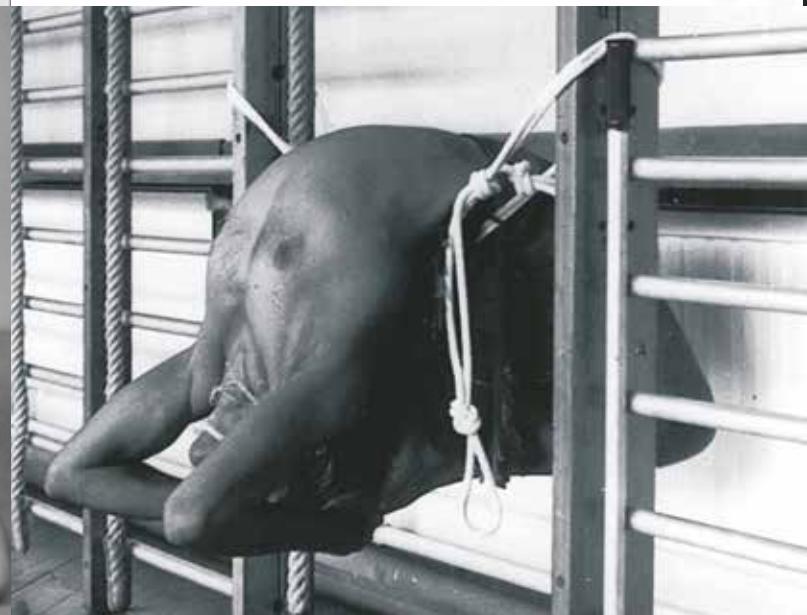
PIYM NEWS

#09

Evolution & Maturity
in practice by Guruji

Dharmic practice of
Asana by Birjoo H. Mehta

Importance of Asana
in Dhyana by Guruji



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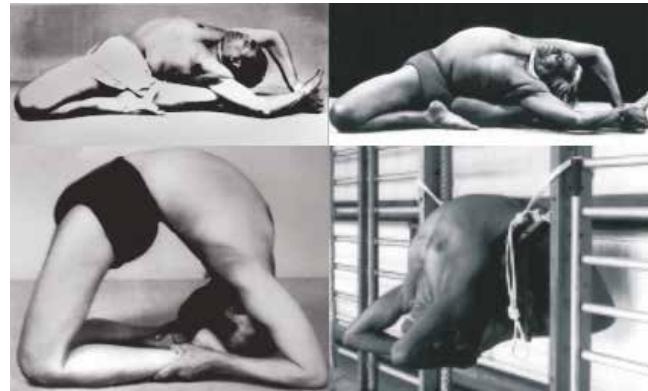
sa tu dīrghakāla
nairantarya satkāra
asevitāḥ
dṛḍhabhūmiḥ

Reminding ourselves
to maintain our
practices with
enthusiasm, devotion
and persistence will
keep moving us
towards a steadier
state of mind



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Finding a certified Iyengar Yoga teacher in your area



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EDITOR'S NOTE

It's 2022! I remember being influenced whilst studying at the university, I made resolutions and realized that they break me more than they made me! Many years later, I feel smarter. If it is something that makes me happy, makes me feel good, I will continue with it year in year out. That means continual yoga practice.

End of 2021 and the beginning of 2022 is the time to tie up loose ends at work or at home, take time off to re-charge, de-stress or just take time off for some "me-time" or time with the family. This is also the period to break away from our set, time-packed routine... for a short while.

It is easier to get back to the daily rush of getting the kids to school, rush through traffic to work but getting back to our yoga practice can be challenging. Uncannily there seemed to be new responsibilities, new duties, new list of "to do things" as one steps into the new year!

For this quarter's theme, I was given three articles to edit and they were enlightening yet profound.

The first article by Guruji on the *Evolution and Maturity in Practice* is Guruji's personal yoga journey. His journey evolved from a young yoga showman to decades of seeking until he was able "to be dharmic with his asanas" according to Birjoo Mehta.



This leads me to the next article, *Dharmic Practice of Asana* by Birjoo. He says that when an action is dharmic, it sustains everybody. Further he continues, "Guruji's asanas are the way there are because he did them with dharma. He knew what was to be done." A really thought-provoking article.

Finally, an article entitled *Importance of Asana in Dhyana* by Guruji. For one who does not mince his words, Guruji made it clear that the correct asana is important if one is to sit for a long time in meditation.

It may be challenging but a continual yoga practice is essential if we are to embark on our personal yoga journey. Now, if you are not ready for the journey, well, you will still benefit from all the positive effects of practicing yoga like de-stress, good health, vitality, flexibility and keeping aging at bay! That's incentive!

As we step into 2022, we fervently hope that a brightly coloured rainbow is spread across the new year...



Evolution in practice occurs as one refines the body inside as well as the intellect. This intellectual refinement develops tremendous intuitive understanding to see and practice yoga with a different perspective altogether.

From this stage onwards, the inner body and the inner mind becomes more attentive, toned and cultured than before.

At the age of 30, 40 and 50, I was seeking and searching with my practice and bringing the missing points and missing links for the cognition of the mind in the asanas, as well as in the movements of my body and breath. I was studying the missing grips, changing various grips, at different times measuring the wrong tensions with the right tensions and vice versa, in the body. It was like a fluctuating body in a fluctuating mind. Sometimes, I touch to zero tension. I developed them so that they remain as permanent imprints in my intelligence.

The body has its own mechanisms and the mind has its own. The body has its own intelligence. I had to bring out this hidden intelligence for the mind to focus on. This is called the body mind language, but I do not think it is the right terminology to use for the intelligence of the body. The body language is an outer expression and the mind language is an inner expression. Intelligence of the body rubs with the intelligence of the mind and the intellect. This is a phenomenon known only to yoga practitioners. Hence, there is a vast difference between body language and body intelligence. Body

language is an expression of a failure or a success; this was in my early presentations.

Body language is a kind of exhibitionism or showmanship. While giving public

performances, I used this to make each part of my body express itself as an individual entity. This is known as body language or egoism of the body. After expressing the ego of the body, I used to feel that there was something more than body cult or language that is the mental quality of the body. The content – mind, ego, intelligence and self – and the container – the body – has to

work in unison so that both the content as well as the container express together.

Everybody knows that the body is matter. Our ancient science declares that mind is also matter. If the body is gross matter, the mind is subtle matter or one can call the mind as fine matter. It took me a long time to understand these differences in a practical way. It is very easy to talk about such things but to experience it moment to moment in sadhana is very difficult. These differences come to the surface only after you reach the zero state of tension in asanas. Now I say that my physical, mental and intellectual maturity is on an equal level while doing asana, pranayama and dhyana.

The two scooter accidents I had in 1979 limited my movements a great deal. Probably if I had not met with these accidents, I would have penetrated the

inner body – I use the word inner body – far deeper, with ease and comfort. For me, the inner body is where the physio-psychological body ends and the mental body begins. This is my inner body and the inner mind. I can feel the organic body with ease, but beyond the organic body is an empty space inside the body, and to penetrate that empty space requires a great amount of discipline, attention and observation. While observing one has to attentively reflect again and again on re-adjustments so that in the re-adjustments one does not disturb the other parts which are already in an attentive



"zero" state of action.

Probably I could have jumped miles ahead if the accidents had not occurred. Sometimes destiny plays and disturbs one's determined goal and practice, tempting one to give up making further efforts. Destiny almost made me give up the practice as the movements were very painful. Because of my strong will power I have not given up. I had to begin as a raw beginner after the accidents and pursue yoga persistently. I re-tooled and re-tyred myself. My inner body was still aching but the will ignited me to work to come out from the weakness in the parts of

the body that were injured. Even at 81, I can say with confidence that I am bringing out the best. Today my well-being is not from the physical level but from the mental and intellectual level.

Naturally, matter decays, the gross body decays before the finer body decays. When the gross body goes on decaying, the mind gives way. In order to keep the mind fine-tuned, I have to tone and keep the gross physical body expressing the dynamic vibrancy latent in the cells by attending to each and every fiber of my body.

Glamour is purely the external expression of the body. My practice of yoga has brought glamour to my inner body, to my cells, fibers, tendons, muscles and organs. This glamour is nothing else but refinement in practice and experience. Refinement of soul comes with intense work with the internal body and mind. With internal practice the natural process of deterioration is slowed down and arrested. I did not pay attention to my external beauty as I was sick and looked ugly due to ill health. I paid much more attention to my inner body and inner lively sensation, which to me is inner beauty. Today, at the age of 81, I do not think of my age when I practice. The very thought of age can become your enemy in your practice. People remind me of my age, but while practicing yoga I am beyond my body and its age.

The moment one thinks of old age the mind takes shelter to escape and the body fails. Hence, I work and struggle to find out where the blocks are and each day, I work to remove these blocks and go ahead without thinking of my age while practicing. I keep in my heart the will to work, to maintain this extreme refinement in my body and sharpness in my intelligence. If in my practice, my body skin contracts, I feel my mind is contracting. If part of my body is dull, I know my mind is dull in that area.

I am grateful to God for giving me the wonderful gift of sensitivity of mind, intellect and body. I am working hard even now to

maintain that quality, because nature is to shrink as one ages, but I am not allowing it to shrink so that my mind may not become small or petty. If the mind shrinks, the courage also shrinks and ageing begins. I do not call it struggle because I love to practice yoga, I am comparing the duality that arrives at this age. Where the body says I cannot reach, yoga practice helps me to reach there. I am not struggling but educating the channelled mind to move consciously everywhere in its body. This way I keep in contact with the inner body, so that the body does not feel the age and is one with the Soul.

Though ageing and death is certain to the body, for me practicing yoga keeps me away from the idea of age and death. Practice brings the diminishing body in contact with the Eternal Soul. The eternity of the Soul does not remain mere ideology any more as you experience it practically. The union is a very complicated thing. Many people may not understand easily. Know that I do not stretch the body today, which I used to do in my 30s and 40s. Now I stretch the intelligence in my body to expand so that the intelligence stretches the body. In the beginning, I was a seeker but no longer one now. I stretch my intelligence and make the body to stretch on its own. I work with the intelligence so that I support the mind in the body.

Previously, I made my body and mind the important means to master yoga. Now I make them secondary and I move my intelligence firmly with the Self. The Self as content expands in my body and the fluidity of my inner body expands the solid body. It is a very subtle and sublime practice which non-practitioners perhaps may not understand.

If you see a young person's and an aged person's body, the top ribs shrink in an ageing person to a greater extent. Why? Only when we are full of life the top chest is broader than the middle chest or the

bottom chest. Look at a skeleton. There you see the contraction is on the top. This fact is guiding me, how the energy of life shrinks from the external to the internal and from the internal to the inner most. When shrinking goes on, naturally the life force does not reach there and so the life energy gets contracted.

When the life energy starts contracting, the top ribs get smaller and smaller. There is no

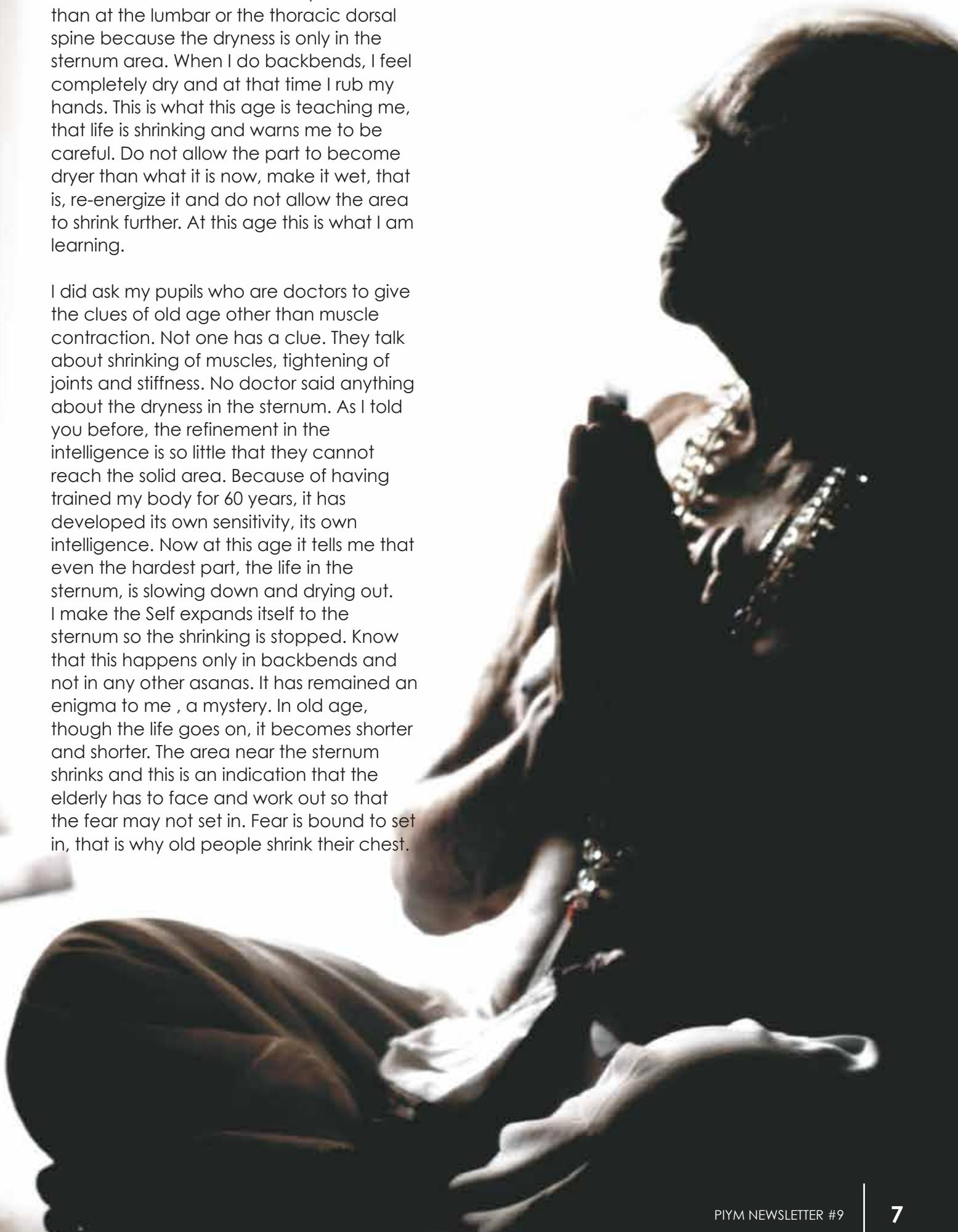


room or space for the energy to occupy. They get dried out and the energy does not flow to the extremities. The lifeline becomes short and evaporates at the last moment. That is why I am practicing to see that the life energy does not shrink from my body. You have seen me today doing a lot of backbends. When you do backbends, you complain of backache and pain, you will be surprised to know that at this age backbends bring pain and dryness in the sternum. I do not get aches or pains like you but I get pain in the sternum. This is how old age sets in.

The sternum is known as a dry area where energy receded. Even a medical person will tell you that this area is a bony structure and has very little movement. You do not feel the dryness in the sternum at your age. When I am in touch with yoga for years why do I feel this dryness and shrinking? This is how I know that old age develops by this shrinking quality.

Even today when you see my backbends, I do them more in the cervical spine area than at the lumbar or the thoracic dorsal spine because the dryness is only in the sternum area. When I do backbends, I feel completely dry and at that time I rub my hands. This is what this age is teaching me, that life is shrinking and warns me to be careful. Do not allow the part to become dryer than what it is now, make it wet, that is, re-energize it and do not allow the area to shrink further. At this age this is what I am learning.

I did ask my pupils who are doctors to give the clues of old age other than muscle contraction. Not one has a clue. They talk about shrinking of muscles, tightening of joints and stiffness. No doctor said anything about the dryness in the sternum. As I told you before, the refinement in the intelligence is so little that they cannot reach the solid area. Because of having trained my body for 60 years, it has developed its own sensitivity, its own intelligence. Now at this age it tells me that even the hardest part, the life in the sternum, is slowing down and drying out. I make the Self expands itself to the sternum so the shrinking is stopped. Know that this happens only in backbends and not in any other asanas. It has remained an enigma to me, a mystery. In old age, though the life goes on, it becomes shorter and shorter. The area near the sternum shrinks and this is an indication that the elderly has to face and work out so that the fear may not set in. Fear is bound to set in, that is why old people shrink their chest.



DHARMIC PRACTICE OF ASANA

by Birjoo H. Mehta

There are many interpretations of dharma but Guruji's often-used definition came from the epic *Mahabharata* which says dharma uplifts, sustains and upholds those who have fallen, are in the process of falling or will fall.

I will tell you a story to help you understand what is dharma.

A number of priests were called for a feast. But the host put a condition that while the priests could eat as much as they want, they should do it without bending their elbows. So, the priests fed each other and they had a huge circle in which one person fed the other, the other fed the third, the third fed the fourth and so on. Because of this action, everything was sustainable. Each person was fed by the action of others. A priest did not feed himself. A priest did not feed others to be fed himself. I say this because even if somebody stops feeding him, the priest has a mind which says whatever happens I will do whatever I am supposed to do and he keeps on feeding the others. My feeding others has no connection with my getting fed myself. If I stop feeding the next priest and nobody else feeds him, he may die. And then the next in the chain will die. And then the third in the chain will die and so on. The ecosystem collapses.

The beauty about dharma is that it is based on the idea that you are not able to feed yourself. You are fed by the others, whether it is about food or money, your job, everybody else is feeding you. You are at liberty to stop feeding others but if you do, that may bring the ecosystem down. Your action of not feeding the others becomes

adharmaic because it is not allowing the system to flourish. And if you feed others that action is dharmic because it is allowing others to get fed and thus allowing the ecosystem to flourish.

Let's experiment with an asana. Sit on a chair, take the arms back and insert them inside the side bars of the chair. Now move the corners of the shoulders back and observe what is happening to the chest.

The moment you move the shoulders back, you feel some sensation in the chest, as if something inside the chest is spreading. Maintain that.

Whatever you do, the action should go on enhancing that spreading inside the chest. Take the arms behind the back, insert a belt between the arms at the elbows, tighten the belt such that the arms are slightly wider than the shoulders. Don't focus on hitting the belt, don't focus on the movement of the shoulders – those are things that are to be done. But you should be observing what you feel in the chest. The awareness should be in the chest, the attention should be in the chest, and use your arms for the chest.

Who do you think is feeding the chest? The arms? The shoulders? Shoulder blades? The arms that are doing without expectation – they are doing the dharmic action.

Now observe the state of the mind when you try to get the arms to come closer to each other – the arms which are actors are not hearing the story of the chest but

hearing itself or whatever you are trying to do. Listen to the story of the arms and observe how your mind fluctuates. Now listen to the story of the chest; the chest will determine how much the arms have to move. This action by the arms is done for sustainability, without looking at what is happening to itself – this is *dharmaic* action.

The action when it is *dharmaic* sustains everybody. An action which is for itself isn't. It is *adharmaic* and it completely collapses the ecosystem.

Every asana that we do creates an impression within the body by which you can recognise that you are doing that asana. When you do any asana, there is a certain feeling which the organic body, physical body and cellular body gives you which makes you understand that it is *Sirsasana* or *Paschimottanasana* or *Urdhva Dhanurasana*. These impressions are the *samskaras* and are referred to as the ego of the pose, that which gives the pose an identity. That is the character that you give to the pose. The quality remains the same and it becomes the quality of your body and not the asana. Thus, every asana exhibits the quality of that substratum and not its own individuality. That is the characteristic of the asana.

That is the state which one aspires to become *dharmaic*. Whether you are in *Trikonasana*, *Parsvakonasana* or *Ardha Chandrasana*, the feeling has to remain the same. Every asana should feel the same. Every asana creates its own *vrittis*, distortions, but when you are doing the asana with this *dharma*, every asana feels the same whether you are doing *Trikonasana* or *Sirsasana*.

Now, you might be interested to know why is it that I have only focused on the chest? Can I focus on the legs also? You can, but then the legs should be the subject. The legs should be feeling like the chest, it should be the storyteller. Then the ecosystem is managed. Then the chest will also work equally well. The *dharma* should be followed so that everything is working

for the leg. You can choose different parts of the body and then maintain the *dharma* so that every part is working for that part.

Finally, the last stage: what you should do after the leg is fed, the leg should say: my *dharma* is to feed everybody else. You have fed me, now I am going to feed everybody else. When it feeds everybody else, when it becomes a subject, what does it do? It has to radiate. That means, the feeling is that from the centre of the bone of the leg should be spreading, and in that spread itself, it reaches a state of *nirodha*.

When you are doing *Adho Mukha Svanasana*, you are not disturbing yourself; the mind is not disturbed, when the mind is not disturbed it is going into the state of *dharma*, which is a state that you are not disturbing the ecology. And, the ecology is not disturbing you. That is called an act which doesn't have any residues. And because it doesn't have any residue, you will not injure yourself. With this kind of practice, you will find that there is no disturbance anywhere. Everything remains still. This still body is peace in the body, poise in the mind. Body remains quiet, the mind automatically becomes quiet.

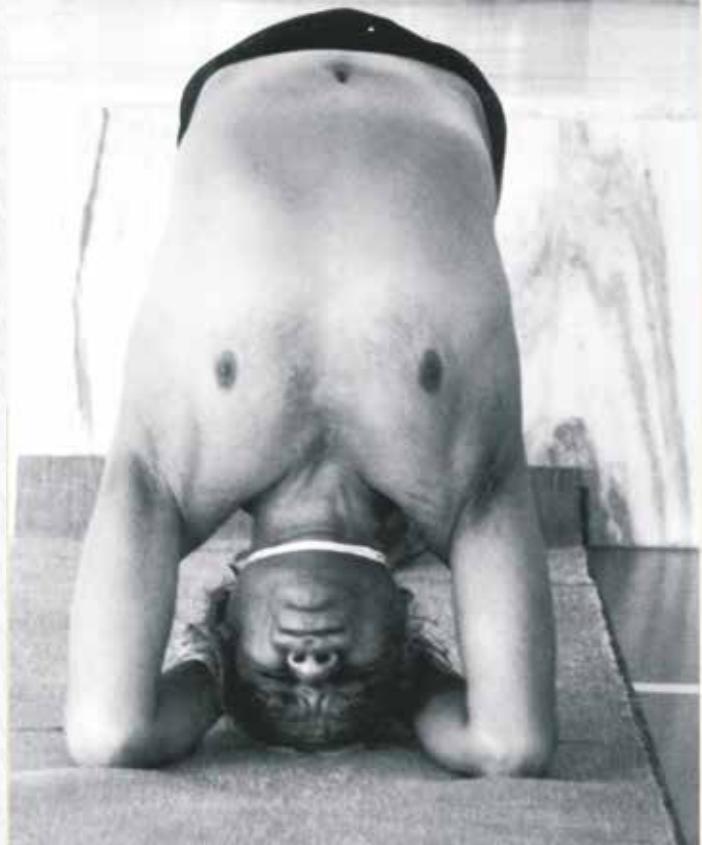
Try to practice asanas in this manner. No person is so independent as to be able to feed himself or herself. Every person is fed by the others. And in turn if you feed the others in a manner that it sustains this ecological state, then that action of yours is *dharmaic*. If the individual was in a position to feed himself entirely, independent of any aspect of human behaviours or nature's bounty then there is no need for *dharma*. The only way you can acknowledge the bounty of the universe is by doing *dharmaic* actions or actions that sustain, that support the ecology, the ecosystem.

This happens only when you realise that you are entirely supported by the universe and not by yourself.

Practice of asana is very important because it strengthens the nerves, lungs and other parts of the body for their role in preparing a firm foundation for meditation.

The classic meditative pose is a yogasana with the spine held straight and firm. When the ancients counselled: Sit in any comfortable position with the spine straight, they certainly did not mean slouching will do. Sitting in a loose, collapsed sort of way induces drowsiness or sleep, which should not be mistaken for meditation.

Meditation does not make the mind dull, but razor sharp, vibrant yet still and silent. This state cannot be achieved without a firm, stable sitting posture, where the energy of the spine ascends and the intelligence of the brain descends and dissolves in the seat of conscience or the heart, where the true Self reveals itself.



Importance of Asana in Dhyana

by Guruji

In dhyana or pure meditation, the eyes are shut, the head held erect and the gaze directed downwards and backwards as though the parallel gaze of the eyes is searching the infinity that lies behind and beyond the back of the head. Then the facial skin is relaxed and made to descend. The eyes, the ears and the root of the tongue are pacified and quiet so that the brain releases from their contact. The hands are pressed together, palm against palm in front of the chest.

This classic dhyana pose is not only symbolic but also practical.



Symbolically, the palms salute and surrender to the Lord within. This surrender breaks the chain of distracting thoughts and increases the intensity of one's concentration.

Practically, the increase or decrease of pressure on the palms is a sensitive gauge of one's alertness and one's freedom from distracting thoughts.

Without perfect harmony between the body, mind and intelligence, meditation is not possible.

Many people think that yogic meditation is without content, a mere emptying of the mind. For those who have had the experience of its richness and satisfying fullness, such an assertion can only sound ridiculous.

The intelligence of the mind may cease its roving but the intelligence of the heart goes out to the Lord. And in dhyana, it is the heart that matters.