

# IYAGNY NEWSLETTER



Dear Members,

It's hard to believe that it's been over a year since Guruji blessed our new Institute and shared his light with all of us. We will soon celebrate his 88th birthday, and two years in the new Institute!

**Our shared enthusiasm for the subject of yoga unifies us all.**

We are thrilled to report that we have a record number of members, over 1040 to date, which also includes an

amazing 114 certified teachers across the four states of our charter, and several more to come.

With the addition of Nicole de Jesús and Sharon Cowdery at the Institute and Association we've been better able to address the concerns of our members, students and Institute faculty, and to continue strengthening relationships with our teachers and students, far and wide.

2006 was the year of building community. And I want to thank you, our members, who include faculty, friends, students and colleagues, for your support in making that a reality. Our shared enthusiasm for the subject of yoga unifies us all. Let us continue to inspire each other.

Please make sure to vote for your new Board members and sign up for Mary's MEMBERS ONLY free class prior to the ANNUAL MEETING on December 10th!

As 2007 approaches, be sure to consider attending the triennial Iyengar Yoga Convention in Las Vegas, Nevada this May. Our very own Geeta Iyengar is going to attend and it is sure to be inspiring.

And we are, of course, planning our own wonderful events for the upcoming year. Stay tuned for more information on a benefit screening of Mira Nair's *The Namesake* in March 2007.

James Murphy  
Director, Iyengar Yoga Institute of New York  
President, Iyengar Yoga Association of Greater New York

Below: Sage Patanjali



# IYAGNY ON THE ROAD

BY JULIA SHaida

## In Celebration of the IYAGNY Yoga Troupe's performance at the *Yoga Journal* Conference in Estes Park Colorado



**(L-R) Back Row:** Kevin Gardiner, Michael Morphis, Lucienne Vidah Van Der Honing, Hugh Millard, Lara Warren, Susan Turis, Adam Vitolo. **Middle Row:** Carolyn Christie, James Murphy, Julia Shaida, Michelle LaRue, Carrie Owerko. **Front:** Naghmeh Ahi

In September I had the opportunity to travel to Estes Park, Colorado with a group of New York teachers who had been preparing an *asana* demonstration for some months. The demo was to be part of the Iyengar Intensive at the 11th Annual *Yoga Journal* Conference.

Part of the demonstration was a reprise of the *Live! Light on Life* production that honored Guruji B.K.S. Iyengar on his visit here last year. Part of it was new—including an opening sequence of twists and seated poses devoted to Patanjali, the first teacher of yoga. I was one of the behind-the-scenes crew who cued the lighting, greeted the audience, and generally helped out.

On the night of the presentation, the nervous energy backstage was high—one teacher explained to me she couldn't feel the floor with her feet—yet as the lights came up and the first *Tadasana* could be seen, a magical transformation began. The nervous energy grounded. The twelve practitioners rooted down, found their feet and their legs, and their poses unfolded—rhythmically, spatially. No one pose stood out. No one person stood out. The poses and practitioners were shining in unison.

Patanjali tells us, “*Sthira sukham asanam*” (*Yoga Sutras* II. 46). This means

that the *asanas* must have *sthira*: strength and stability. They must also have *sukha*: ease, happiness. The happiness of this demonstration came from the inner penetration and the uplifted hearts of these devoted practitioners.

I went home to my own practice inspired—and convinced that some of that happiness had entered into me—that an inner opening was on its way.

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Thanks to all of you who joined us for the Sunday, September 17 Dress Rehearsal at the Institute. Donations in honor of your participating teachers totaled over \$1,900 which helped defray their out-of-pocket conference costs. Go to the photo galleries page on the IYAGNY website to view photos from the rehearsal.

We are also grateful to Lee Irvine, Gina King, Julia Shaida, and Susan Turis for their assistance with the demo.

### **Participating teachers:**

Carolyn Christie, Carol Foster, Kevin Gardiner, Michelle La Rue, Naghmeh Ahi, Hugh Millard, Michael Morphis, James Murphy, Carrie Owerko, Lucienne Vidah Van Der Honing, Adam Vitolo and Lara Warren.

# SVADHYAYA WITH GEETA IYENGAR

BY TORI MILNER

At the end of a rigorous back-bending class in August, Geetaji gave an impromptu talk on how important it is to watch and study ourselves during the practice of *asana*. This experience was a real highlight during my second trip to Pune with the always profound and insightful Iyengars.

Early on in the class Geetaji's eagle eyes went directly to a long-time practitioner's right knee and the effect that it was having on his whole body. She brought him up on stage and had us all take a look at his *Tadasana* and the tilts that were presenting themselves as a result of his recently developed knee problem. "You don't need a special eye," our teacher encouraged us as we looked. And she was right. It was easy to see his tilts. As we watched, Geetaji gave expert instruction, and we witnessed his *Tadasana* transform miraculously into a state of *Samasthiti*, which means equal standing or balance. She had him up on stage and was guiding him directly, but it was so clear that she was guiding all of us, encouraging all of us to study our defects, tilts, and dullness in the body. She was showing us all how to skillfully perform the *niyama* of *svadhyaya* or self-study.

She carried us through the entire class, guiding us through challenging

*asanas* such as *Ustrasana* and *Urdhva Dhanurasana*. She constantly reminded us to keep observing the two sides of the body left and right, and to watch how they behaved differently from one another. She admonished us and encouraged us to bring equanimity to our *asanas* and why that is so important. And she explained it so beautifully, weaving in the sutras.

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She spoke of how the *klesas* (afflictions) influence the body position. She gave an example of angry or depressing thoughts (*dvesa*) and how the brain "hits" toward those thoughts and how that influences the physical body, introducing the tilts and collapse. She said it also occurs with intense happiness or success—that our thoughts leave to follow those feelings (*raga*). In that same way she said the body may puff or overdo in certain areas. All these things—depression, anxiety, worries, misunderstandings, stress, problems, even success, pride—affect the *asanas*.

She told us to study our emotional and intellectual balance along with the physical. The *asana* has to come to the level that you experience true *sthira sukham asanam* (*Yoga Sutra* 11.46—*asana* is perfect firmness of body, steadiness of intelligence and benevolence of spirit). She continued, "not *sthira sukha* enjoying the world, not *sthira sukha* your mind is going somewhere else, but that you are in such a state that you are with your soul and you cannot go anywhere." This is why the accuracy and the alignment in each *asana* is essential and how each *asana* should be performed and studied, she explained.

In life, it's easy to see someone else's tilts, the challenge lies in knowing how and where to correct it. But perhaps the most difficult task of all is to study our own "tilts" and clarify our own difficulties and problems and where they originate. The Iyengar family and the Iyengar method certainly have inspired me to do so regularly. It is a journey that is never dull—unlike my right shoulderblade which I am now more aware of than ever since that trip!

## COLLAB • NETTING

BY MARY DUNN AND DALIA ZWICK

Col • lab'o • ra'tion

n. (act of working jointly)

Net • work • ing

(a supportive system of sharing information and services among individuals and groups having a common interest)

Iyengar yoga can be integrated into the western allopathic therapeutic approach so that people can gain the most out from their treatment. Collaboration and networking are helping spread the knowledge originating from the great teaching of B.K.S. Iyengar.

Over the last few years there has been collaborative work between Senior Iyengar Yoga teacher Mary Dunn and Dalia Zwick (PT, Ph.D.), a local physical therapist who is also an Iyengar yoga practitioner, aimed at promoting Iyengar Yoga among health care professionals. This collaboration focuses on how to best use Iyengar Yoga principles in rehabilitation. Mary and Dalia have conducted workshops on this topic at a local and national level. In June 2006, the American Physical Therapy Association invited them to present a one-day workshop for physical therapists at the annual APTA meeting in Orlando, Florida. This was the second presentation on the same topic at the annual meeting of this organization. The workshop was well received by attendees: "Excellent techniques presented that can be adapted to any treatment practice", "Innovative

techniques were offered that include a holistic and comprehensive approach", "A topic often neglected in PT schools, very helpful with patients," were among their comments.

A new magazine, *PT/OT Insider*, for physical, occupational, and speech therapists, features an article this month written by Dalia and Mary on Iyengar Yoga tenets in rehabilitation for people with spinal cord injury (SCI). This magazine's editor plans to print a series of such articles on applications of Iyengar Yoga for different neurological conditions. Another recent collaboration included teaching a section in a course in alternative medicine at Long Island University's doctorate physical therapy program. Future plans to expand this collaboration include a workshop for teachers, therapists, and people with disabilities on how Iyengar Yoga can be implemented in rehabilitation, and how teachers at yoga centers can apply this understanding in their classes.

Plans for a yoga therapeutic course as continuing education for the medical community and advanced level Iyengar Yoga teachers are being drafted. B.K.S. Iyengar's philosophy stresses that those health care professionals who are interested in implementing Iyengar Yoga into medical practice should become part of the Iyengar Yoga-committed teachers/practitioners' community. Many of Iyengar Yoga principles can be integrated into the medical model. Medical professionals and advanced Iyengar Yoga teachers who are interested are invited to offer their suggestions and/or contributions.

## CHRYS SKLEROS: VOLUNTEER AND FRIEND

BY GERRY VISCO

The *Bhagavad Gita* defines karma yoga as “selfless service performed without the expectation of any reward.” Few people embody devotion and service like volunteer Chrys Skleros, who has given much time and energy to make the Institute, the home of the Association, a better place for all of us. You may have noticed Chrys at one of the workshops, events, or regularly scheduled classes lending a hand. He escorted guests at the *Live! Light on Life* event at City Center in October 2005 and assisted at the YOGAthon this May.

Chrys is a long-time New Yorker who spent a good part of his life as a performer and actor. A few years ago, three traumatic events changed his life when he lost his father, his partner of ten years who left New York after 9/11, and his mother. “We were walking down the street, she grabbed my arm, and then she died. She’d just had surgery for cancer, but a reaction to the anesthesia created a blood clot. That’s when I started to shut down.” He started doing yoga in a search for balance in his life and to lessen his anxiety.

Chrys initially came to the Iyengar Yoga Institute two years ago to attend the HIV/AIDS class that James Murphy teaches which he had heard about from a friend. He was first diagnosed as HIV+ 20 years ago. “I’ve been on medication for most of my adult life,” he told me. At his first class, he was sure he’d never be able to keep up. “All these people were there who knew what they were doing.

But later that night, I felt so good. In two weeks, I was used to it,” he said.

Chrys comes into the Institute three times a week to help out. He’s the one who wipes down the props, sweeps the studios, and assists with whatever the teachers and staff might need. “Sometimes, my volunteering is purely selfish—when I’m having a bad day, a few hours at the Institute puts me in a better mood,” he said. Chrys loves going to yoga class and the results have changed his life—he’s regained a lot of weight, feels fewer aches and pains, and calmed his mind. “My yoga classes are wonderful! I look like another person. And it’s so much better than taking another pill,” he said. Chrys attends class three days a week and especially enjoys the pranayama class with Brooke Myers. He hopes to teach yoga himself one day.

When Chrys volunteered for the *Live! Light on Life* event at City Center, he had no idea he’d be personally welcoming Mr. Iyengar, who’d been stuck in a New

York City traffic jam en route to the performance. “I was so overwhelmed when he arrived. I said, excuse me, Mr. Iyengar, can you follow me to the elevator.” He laughed, and getting more serious told me, “Outside of my family, I’d always felt like an outsider. It’s fun to do something positive.”

Hopefully Chrys’s good work will inspire our readers to join him and all the other volunteers who help the Institute function better. Whether you have talent with events, development, publishing our newsletter, or the day-to-day running of the office and classes, your time, energy, and special abilities would be appreciated to make the IYAGNY community even better. All creative ideas are welcome. And thanks again to Chrys, our volunteer-in-residence!



Photo : Gerry Visco

# UPDATES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

## 2006 YOGATHON

Thanks again to all those who contributed to the YOGAthon this past May. Our final tally came to just over \$30,000!

Proceeds from the YOGAthon will be split in three ways:

- \$10,000 to benefit Guruji's Bellur Project;
- \$10,000 to support IYAGNY programming including outreach to underserved populations;
- \$10,000 to develop print and on-line resources promoting Iyengar Yoga, IYAGNY and our teachers

Congratulations to every teacher who participated and made the event a grand success. Special commendation goes to Institute Director James Murphy, who raised more than \$4,000 for the Association with his 113 *Chakransanas*.

Complimentary weekend workshops at the Institute will be awarded to the two teachers who raised the next highest donations: Kim Peralta, who raised a total of \$1,592 and held a 63-minute *Sirsasana* and Michelle La Rue, who raised a total of \$1,453 and completed 112 *Sirsasana* dropbacks. Thanks again to all who made the day memorable, fun, and inspiring!

## MIRA NAIR'S THE NAMESAKE SPRING 2007

IYAGNY is pleased to announce a benefit screening of Mira Nair's *The Namesake* this spring. Based on the novel by Jhumpa Lahiri, the cast includes Kal Penn (*Harold & Kumar Go to White Castle*), Jacinda Barrett (*The Human Stain*; *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*)

and Indian screen sensation Tabu. Proceeds from the event will benefit IYAGNY and Mira's own MAISHA Film Lab ([www.maishafilmlab.com](http://www.maishafilmlab.com)). MAISHA provides new screenwriters and film directors from East Africa and South Asia with access to the professional training and production resources necessary to articulate their visions.

Watch your mail for an invitation. If you are interested in serving on the event committee, please contact the Institute at [info@iyengarnyc.org](mailto:info@iyengarnyc.org)

## IYAGNY WELCOMES SHARON COWDERY TO THE INSTITUTE

In August the Institute welcomed our new Institute Manager, Sharon Cowdery. As her title suggests, Sharon is responsible for the general operation of the Institute, including supervising the front desk staff, taking care of the facility itself, and making sure things go smoothly with regular classes and special programs. She works closely with IYAGNY's Board of Directors to take ideas and initiatives and put them into action. Her role is essential in helping the Association to fulfill its mission.

Sharon says that she was thrilled to find this position—it's a perfect fit for her skills, varied background and interests. Originally from Washington D.C., Sharon attended school at the University of Maryland and then moved to Bellingham, Washington where she worked in the bicycle industry. While living in the Pacific Northwest she not only met her husband, Todd, but she also began studying Iyengar

Yoga. As an avid athlete and cyclist she was initially attracted to the physical alignment aspect of the practice, but soon found that it had a positive effect on all aspects of her being in ways she had not anticipated.

In the fall of 2004 Sharon, Todd (an actor), and their dog Bandit moved to New York. As a relative newcomer to the city she is particularly aware of how assaultive the urban environment can be. She sees how much it can make us, perhaps unconsciously, become self-protective, sometimes to the point at which it is difficult to take into account the needs of others. In framing her vision for the Institute Sharon says, "I notice this self-protectiveness making its way to the 11th floor ... and into the Institute. My vision is to create an environment where we let go of the perceived need for self-protection. Then when we leave the Institute we can carry our rediscovered openness back into the city to make it an even more wonderful place."

Sharon, with her calm countenance, intelligence, and dedication to her work is already making our Institute a more wonderful place, and we are pleased that she is with us. Welcome, Sharon!

Below: Sharon Cowdery



Photo: Gerry Visco

## NEW: ASK A TEACHER!

Having trouble working on a pose? We invite you to submit questions about all aspects of your yoga practice. We will select questions which have broad appeal, consult with our Association experts, and post their replies in the next newsletter and on the website. All questions should be directed to [ic@iyengarnyc.org](mailto:ic@iyengarnyc.org).

## CONGRATULATIONS!

To all IYAGNY Teachers who recently passed their certification exams:

### Teachers in Training:

Cathy Adamo  
Jay Bolsom  
Henriet Cohen  
Adinah Ghen  
Stacy Chiulli  
Maiga Palkaunieks  
Masha Veysel  
Adam Vitolo  
Sarah Whiteside

### Introductory:

Naghmeh Ahi  
Rose Dwyer  
Anneke Faas  
Michel Franey  
Judi Friedman  
Jill Ganassi  
Miki Giffune  
Eve Holbrook  
Ann McDermott-Kave  
Sheryl Nigro  
Lorene Zant

### Jr. Intermediate I:

Matt Dreyfus  
Leslie Freyberg  
Tori Milner  
Cynthia Worby

### Jr. Intermediate II:

Yvonne de Kock

### Jr. Intermediate III:

Lara Warren

## FROM THE FRONT DESK!

Our policies are intended to enhance the experience for everyone at the Institute—students, instructors and staff alike.

**We ask that you sign in prior to the start of class.** Please wait for an acknowledgment from the staff member at the desk before proceeding to the changing room.

**Presenting your orange IYAGNY key tag is the quickest way to sign in.** If you don't have one, we'll provide one. Paying by cash or check will also speed the process. It's tempting to rush into class and worry about signing in afterwards. While this might be more convenient for your immediate needs, it makes life much more difficult for our staff and faculty.

**Please be mindful of our serene environment.** Kindly turn off cell phones and pagers. If you must make a call, please return to the vestibule outside the glass door. When waiting for your class, please speak in a quiet voice as other classes are in session.

**Please be generous with your space in the studio.** Welcome fellow students by moving your mat to make room for those who need a place.

**We have a 15 minute window to accommodate late students.** Please do not ask us to grant you an exception. The policy prevents disruption for your fellow students and the instructor, and protects you from injury.

**Leave no trace.** Please use the cubbies and hooks provided in the changing rooms to store your belongings. Put away props neatly, place trash in receptacles, and take all belongings home with you.

Your suggestions for ways we can enhance the experience are always welcome.

# IYENGAR YOGA



ASSOCIATION OF GREATER NEW YORK

WWW.IYENGARNYC.ORG

150 W. 22nd Street, 11th Floor  
New York, New York 10011  
Tel. 212 691 9642

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Tel. 212 691 9642

## EDITOR

Tori Milner

## CONTRIBUTORS

Mary Dunn, Nicole de Jesús, Gina King,

Tori Milner, Julia Shaida, Gerry Visco,

Dalia Zwick

## PHOTOGRAPHY

Kevin Gardiner, William Irwin, Gerry Visco

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## KEVIN GARDINER

Kevin is one of the original organizers of the Institute and a well-loved teacher throughout New York City. We have been so lucky to have him on our faculty and we want to congratulate him on his upcoming wedding and the start of his new life in Budapest, Hungary. He will be on a leave of absence until next summer. You will be missed, Kevin!