

IYAGNY NEWSLETTER



Dear Members,

It's hard to believe that we are over halfway through the year. We've had some wonderful workshop experiences with Laurie Blakeney, Matthew Sanford and many of us attended the National Iyengar Yoga

Convention in May with Geeta Iyengar. We've had some real successes to report, including *The Namesake* movie premiere event and party,

and our third annual Yoga-thon, as well as participation in events at ABC Carpet and Donna Karan's Urban Zen Initiative.

So thanks especially to all of you "behind the scenes" who are members of the board, who volunteer to produce events, coordinate the catering, clean the studios, write articles for the newsletter, work on committees, and all the many ways that we come together to keep the Iyengar Yoga Association of Greater New York a thriving organization and regional hub for Iyengar Yoga. Events such as the Yoga-thon provide a time that people can socialize in the space when normally they are rushing in and out of class. It is a great boost in building community.

Pulling together as a community is especially important right now

Pulling together as a community is especially important right now, as Mary Dunn, our senior teacher, responds to the challenge of cancer. Mary looks forward to being a presence at the Institute as soon as is prudent and possible. She continues to be an inspiration through her blog, www.marydunn.blogspot.com where you can read her words and the wonderful stories, poems, and ideas and thoughts that have come forward.

James Murphy
Director, Iyengar Yoga Institute of New York

Below: Sage Patanjali

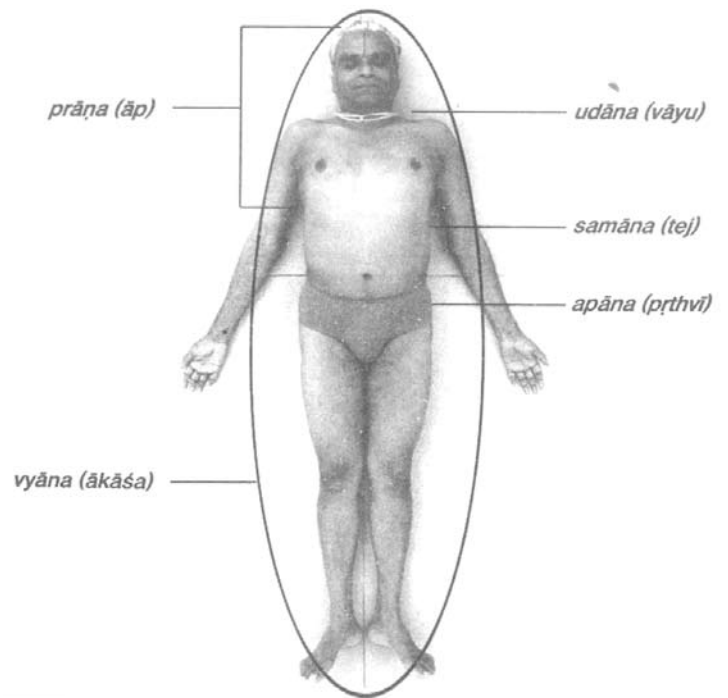


LAURIE BLAKENEY: HIDDEN MYSTERIES

BY JULIA SHaida

"Have you ever practiced in such a way
as not to proceed further?"

—Prashant Iyengar, *Yoga and the New Millennium*



(Laurie Blakeney visited the Institute February 2-4 and gave four interrelated classes. She is the owner/director of the Ann Arbor School of Yoga and, for the past 23 years, has traveled annually to Pune to study with the Iyengars).

I started with recognition when Laurie Blakeney said the *apana vāyu* organizes the movement of the legs. And yet what was a *vāyu*? I wasn't sure. I thought I had heard the word "*apana*" before. Did it mean exhale?

Laurie showed the region of the torso—the abdomen from the pubic bone to the navel: "The *apana vāyu* is the governor of the lower body. When the governor is absent the legs cannot integrate their actions." This sounded familiar to me—legs that didn't quite know their direction, that lifted the knee-caps only to jam the pelvis.

In my fifteen years of doing yoga, I have had a series of low-back injuries and many upper-hamstring pulls. I am muscular. And I am tight. I have

been the student who, in doing forward bends, needs to stay with the concave spine, the head still lifted. Look for me in *Parsvottanasana*, you would see me hovering uneasily in the air—perhaps fretfully reaching to the floor—dreading the next blowout of the hamstring.

In the past year there have been no blowouts, and my lower body has started to feel more integrated. There was one experience in particular that helped me. I was in class and *Parsvottanasana* was the next pose. I didn't want to do it—I had recently strained my right sacroiliac joint, and I was sure I would reinjure myself. "Let me see," the teacher said. I carefully lifted my chest, created a big concave spine and started to bend forward. "Stop," she said. "Start over." She came up behind me and pressed the front hip bones together as I bent forward. She made length through the belly for me. My back released, my hamstring released. I had been over-concave in my low back. What I needed was a softening, a flowing, a gentle hollowing as of the exhale of the breath.

I had been missing my governor: the *apana vayu*.

Vayu comes from the root *vaa*, to “move” or “blow.” *Vayu* is often translated “wind.” Ayurvedic texts describe five *vayus*: *apana*, *samana*, *prana*, *udana*, and *vyana*. (See the illustration.) Over the course of the weekend, Laurie explained that the *apana vayu*, located in the abdomen, and the *prana vayu*, in the chest, are wedded. The *apana vayu* (which means literally “downward breath”) is more associated with exhalation, the *prana vayu* (“filling up breath”) with inhalation.

Laurie wove into her teaching the role these two *vayus* played in twisting, back-bending, and in *vinyasa* sequences. She emphasized the importance of dwelling in familiar poses to explore these aspects. Taking on more challenging poses, she said, is like taking on new territory. “One must stay and colonize the area already taken. It is in the known poses, the simple poses, that the ‘hidden mysteries’ reveal themselves.”

So what are some of the qualities of the activated *apana vayu*? It is a movement of the breath at the back of the abdominal organs, which brings a lengthening in the belly and a settling back of the organs. It brings a feeling of emptiness or hollowing in the belly. Laurie had us do *Adho Mukha Virasana* and imagine a beach ball in our belly. Breathe in along the back surface of the beach ball, she said. And as you exhale, let the muscles of the back soften and broaden out from the spine.

She began the Saturday class on twists with a series of hip openers, *Baddha Konasana* variations with a block, and *Gomukhasana*. It is common, she said, for us to experience our legs and pelvis as one “leg-hip-torso clump.” The *apana vayu* helps differentiation to come, so the spine is freed for the twist even as the legs can ground more effectively.

On Sunday, as we moved through a variety of *vinyasa* sequences, Laurie

"It is in the known poses, the simple poses, that the 'hidden mysteries' reveal themselves."

pointed out how the *apana* and *prana vayu* can link unlike poses (for instance, in a series like *Tadasana*, *Uttanasana*, *Adho Mukha Svanasana*, *Navasana*, *Utkatasana*, *Ustrasana*, *Adho Mukha Virasana*) and bring grace and coherence to the changes.

As I have worked in my practice with the *vayus* since Laurie’s workshop, I have been reminded of her phrase “the hidden mysteries.” What is mysterious about the *vayus*? What keeps them hidden—in plain view? For that matter, how have I learned, really, to stop injuring myself?

In the booklet *New Millennium*, Prashant Iyengar talks about “consolidating” our poses. “How much effort have I put in the pose,” he asks, “and in order to

consolidate can I withdraw the efforts but still do the same pose? In other words, can I do the same pose with lesser efforts. This leads toward maturity.”

In exploring the *vayus*, I transform my eagerness to progress, my determination to “do correctly,” into an inward penetration. Strangely enough, I make less muscular effort. But what have I done? I have allowed the wind, the breath, the cosmic energy, to teach.

Illustration from *Astadala Yogamala* Vol. 2 p. 100

MATTHEW SANFORD WORKSHOP: REFLECTIONS

BY TRACY YOUNG



Photo: Jennifer R. Sanford

Salamba Sarvangasana.

I am curled over my shoulders, my hands digging into the warm dough of my lower back as I pry loose one index finger and tuck in the hem of my shirt before my stomach escapes. Pressing my heels toward the ceiling, I strain upward, trying to find the right combination of muscle, balance and will that might allow me to rest, however briefly, in the pose. *Asana*: to abide in. How can I rest? *Sarvangasana* is challenging—and it freaks me out with its close-up of what I find most dismaying about my middle-aged body. Chin to chest, I could easily drown during a particularly fulsome hot flash. My thighs look...hideous. Is my pose even remotely perpendicular? And on and on and on.

*Yogas citta vritti nirhodha.*¹

The chatter quiets, ever so briefly, and all I can hear are fifty other people breathing and the soft whirl of the overhead fan. Then I am startled by unexpected squeak of rubber tires on the bamboo floorboards. The squeaking tires belong to a wheelchair that belongs to Matthew Sanford, a yoga teacher from Minnesota, who has come to the Institute this last weekend in March to teach us about a subtle level of mind body integration.

The workshop began on Friday night, with a reading from Sanford's book, *Waking: A Memoir of Trauma and Transcendence*. Both studios had been opened to accommodate the spillover crowd of students, teachers, curious friends. People lounged on bolsters,

perched on folding chairs—in wheelchairs. This was not your everyday Institute crowd; it was more diverse, a gathering to celebrate yoga outside of the studio—and beyond the able body.

The air on the eleventh floor felt ionized, as all eyes focused on the platform where a slightly paunchy, scruffily bearded, twinkly-eyed man unlocked his wheelchair so he could roll around while he talked, then threatened to dive into the mosh pit because the platform was slanted. "Mine was a mind body injury," Matthew said moving past the horrific details of his injury and rehabilitation to spend the next two hours talking primarily about his struggle with conventional medical thinking. He described how at one point he decided it would be a good idea to amputate his legs since they were "useless." The crowd sighed. Everyone understands self-loathing, the feeling that the body has betrayed us.

"But the body doesn't fail you." Matthew said as if he knew what we were thinking. "It's the mind that fails, the body keeps trucking along." He described his realization that alignment and precision could increase mind body integration in spite of paralysis. That his mind could feel into his legs, creating a subtle flow of energy that made him feel whole. It is this shift in consciousness, he explained, that the medical establishment told him to ignore and that yoga has helped him to believe in. Now, he said, his goal is to bring these techniques back to the medical community, educate people who are involved in rehabilitation, spread the word to veterans' hospitals.

I cheered along with the rest of the audience when the evening was over, but I couldn't help wondering what all of this had to do with me on a practical level.

On Saturday, Mathew taught two classes, one for students in the morning, the other for teachers in the afternoon. I arrived for the morning class, early enough to get a spot and help line up the mats in neat rows, making lanes for Matthew's wheelchair. And then, without fanfare, we began.

Dandasana. Urdhva Hastasana. The poses were simple. Matthew's instructions were quiet. No rapid-fire exhortations to lift our kneecaps or firm our shoulder blades or stretch our heels up the wall. No instructions to cut, wring, or hit out with any of our muscles.

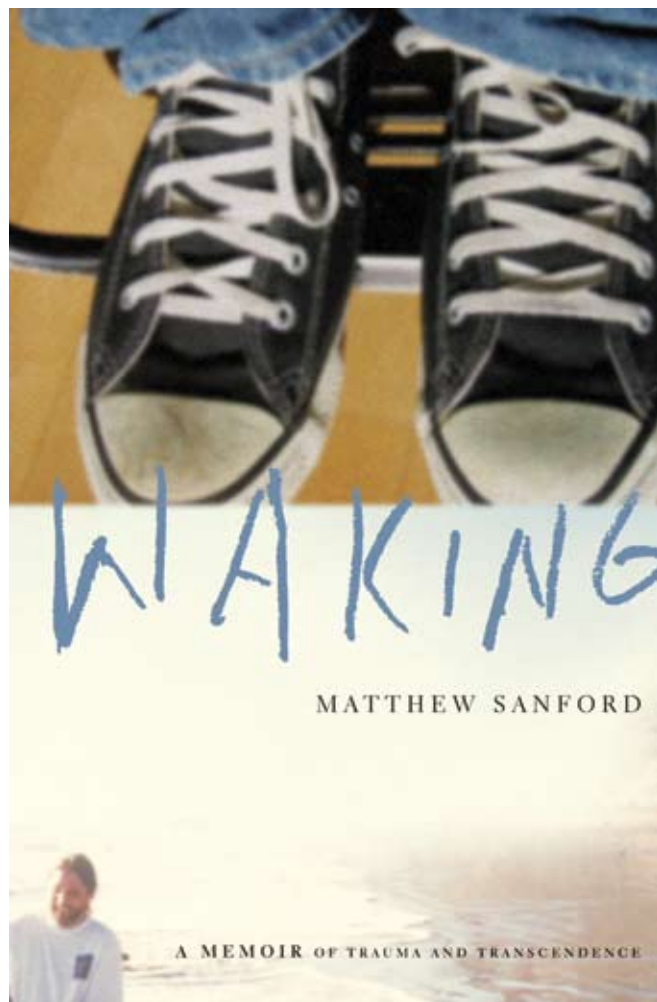
Part of the time we worked in pairs, laying one hand on our partner's diaphragm, another one their upper thighs, to establish a connection. We placed our hands on our partner's ribs as they stretched their arms overhead. We belted our wrists and feel into the connection between our arms and shoulders. We rolled up our sticky mats, belted it between our legs. I wondered if this is how Matthew felt when he was wearing a body cast: the "calming compression" that allowed him to relax. Then he asked us to rock back from *Dandasana* into a double leg raise. Forward again. Back. Forward. Very quiet. Very slow. Feeling into each small adjustment.

"I am not suggesting you practice like this," Mathew said wryly as he wheeled down the aisle. "This is yoga backwards."

How appropriate, I thought. My own practice has going backwards too. I started out feeling completely at home in

my body spite of the fact that I couldn't do the poses. I got a little better. I got ambitious. I hit a wall. I got discouraged. I went from Level 1 to Level 2 then back to Level 1, not knowing whether my practice was maturing or I was just showing my age.

We are finishing up with *Salamba Sarvangasana*. I have finally found a point of balance, not in the pose so much as in my feeling about the pose, when I hear Matthew call out. "Don't be a hero," he says, rolling past. I didn't think I had been in the pose for very long. When I took a workshop last year, I hung on by my fingernails for what felt like a week, sweating mightily. I didn't need to come down. And yet, being relieved of the burden to prove anything feels like freedom. I am beginning to reconnect to the part of me that first came to yoga, with no ambition other than to be there.



And then it's over.

Matthew has made me feel both ashamed of my vanity—and less hamstrung by it. He has made it clear that the estrangement I feel from my body—and the various mind body disconnections that our culture supports, the fear of aging and death—are not so very different from what he has experienced. But most of all—and when he spoke of this I saw him drop his guard and really smile—he has shared the profound gratitude we all feel to Iyengar Yoga.

¹ Yoga Sutras of Patanjali I.2

UPDATES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

IYAGNY RECEIVES FIRST EVER GRANT



L-R: Christe Sanis, Mickey Mouse, Mary Dunn, James Murphy.

The Disney Cast Community Fund presented IYAGNY with a \$2,500 grant that will be used to support our HIV class. As this is our first grant, it is a wonderful step in moving forward with our goals and sets a precedent to apply for more grants in the future. It took place in the ABC building on 66th street and even Mickey was there for photo opts! Special thanks to student Christe Sanis who works for ABC and nominated us and to all the staff who worked on making it all happen.

IYAGNY PARTICIPATES IN "GATEWAY TO INDIA" AT ABC CARPET & HOME

Mary Dunn and Dr. Frank Lipman spoke on "Yoga as Medicine" and a talented troupe of practitioners gave a lovely demonstration at ABC Carpet & Home in March. The event aspired to "seek to shift the paradigm of the West's perception of India, moving beyond outsourcing and mass produced goods and waking our understanding of the profound influence that India has had on our culture..."

DONNA KARAN'S URBAN ZEN INITIATIVE HOSTS WELL-BEING FORUM

In May, Donna Karan hosted a well-being forum of doctors, nurses, nutritionists, wellness and spiritual educators, artists and more whose mission is "to create a working environment where the worlds of conventional and alternative medical practices unite to invent new ways of healing, health, and well-being for all of us." As part of the 10-day Urban Zen initiative, one day was dedicated to Iyengar Yoga. James Murphy and Mary Dunn taught participants using their vast collective experience in the practice of Iyengar Yoga. There was also a panel discussion of "Yoga for Health and Quality of Life." The panelists, moderated by Matthew Sanford—author, paraplegic yoga instructor, and founder of Mind Body Solutions, demonstrated various ways that Iyengar Yoga postures affect a person's physical, mental and psychological state, showing how and why these postures empower structural and physiological change.

Panel Members included:

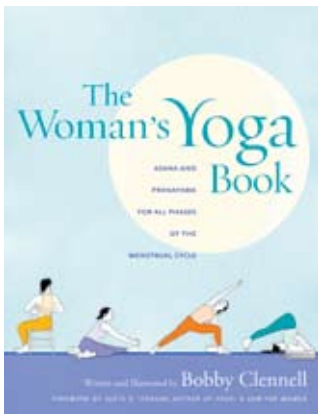
Lindsey Clennell, Faculty Member, Iyengar Yoga Institute of New York;
Mary Dunn, Senior Teacher, Iyengar Yoga Institute of New York;
Carol Foster, Experienced Practitioner and Teacher, Cancer Survivor;
James Murphy, Director & Faculty Member, Iyengar Yoga Institute of New York;
Dalia Zwick, Physical Therapist, PHD, Senior Rehabilitation Supervisor at The Women's Center, Premier HealthCare, Yai/ National Center for People with Disabilities

2008 WORKSHOPS TO WATCH OUT FOR!

Manouso Manos
Faeq Biria
John Schumacher

BOBBY CLENNELL'S NEW BOOK!

Enjoy Bobby Clennell's New Book, *The Woman's Yoga Book: Asana and Pranayama for All Phases of the Menstrual Cycle*. Bobby brings decades of yoga study and teaching experience to *The Woman's Yoga Book*. She offers a comprehensive program of *asana* and *pranayama* designed to support menstrual health from menarche to menopause, along with nutritional and lifestyle information for those times off the yoga mat. Available at the Front Desk.



ROGER COLE WORKSHOP

Revolutionize your yoga by deepening your knowledge of the body in a variety of poses. Join us for an Anatomy/Physiology Asana Practice Weekend for Level 2 and up, September 7-9 and a Teacher's Anatomy Intensive September 10-13. (Teaching experience not required to attend). Roger Cole, Ph.D., student since 1975 and teacher since 1980, has studied yoga at the Iyengar Yoga Institutes in San Francisco and Pune, India. He studied anatomy, physiology and psychology at Stanford University and the University of California San Francisco medical school. Roger currently teaches at Yoga Del Mar in Del Mar, California.

A HOME PRACTICE SEQUENCE FOR LEVEL 1

We encourage you to begin a home practice to deepen your yoga studies. The following sequence was designed by the faculty of the Iyengar Institute of New York specifically for Level 1 students. We recommend using a book such as Geeta Iyengar's *Preliminary Course (PC)* as a guide, and have included page numbers here as a reference tool. Enjoy!

Tadasana to *Urdhva Hastasana*
3x (PC, p 15, 2a)

Tadasana to *Urdhva Baddhanguliyasana*
2x; change interlock of fingers
(PC, pp 16-17)

Vrksasana
2x each side (PC, p 2, 8a or c)

Utthita Trikonasana
2 x each side (PC, p 27, 12b)

Utthita Parsvakonasana
2x each side (PC, p 31, 14b)

Parsvottanasana
2x each side; hands on hips, concave back
(PC, p 45, 23a, then fold halfway down)

Prasarita Padottanasana
2x hands on floor, concave back
(PC, p 47, 24a)

Adho Mukha Svanasana
2x (PC, pp 52- 53)

Urdhva Prasarita Padasana
5 minutes; resting quietly; legs up on wall; back flat on floor (PC, p 93 with modified instructions above)

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 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 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

Julia Shaida, Tracy Young

PHOTOGRAPHY

William Irwin, Jennifer R. Sanford

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Best Wishes to Hugh Millard, who will be taking a leave of absence to attend an MFA program at Boston College over the next two years. We have been so lucky to have him on our faculty and we want to congratulate him on this wonderful undertaking. You will be missed, Hugh!