



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS WITH BKS IYENGAR

Reported by Lorna Walker,
15 July 1989

(With acknowledgment to
Victoria Yoga Center Newsletter)

Q. *Why does my face go purple in Śīrṣāsana and Sarvāṅgāsana?*

A. Your nose is *deviated*. You should exhale through your mouth and prepare carefully for Śīrṣāsana with forward bends. Uttānāsana, Pashimottānāsana and half-Halāsana. In Sarvāṅgāsana you push your ribs forward, blocking the air passages. This is an incorrect movement.

Q. *I have not understood the instructions about keeping the arms long in Śīrṣāsana.*

A. Keep the arms long, they must extend along the floor. We don't have connection between the skin and the flesh. The skin should go one way, the flesh the other. Keep the sensation on the inside and outside of the arm, awareness should be equal on all points. Don't have dullness: the attention must not be thoughtless. Learn the subject and the object. When you bring the attention the subject becomes the object, e.g.: when you bring the pressure to the big toe you tend to lose it on the little toe. This is wrong.

The seeker is the seeking. The seeker is the seer, the seer the seeker.

There is deviation if both parts (e.g. of the arm) are not working the same.

Q. *What purpose do the eyes serve?*

A. Some people close the eyes in meditation. The eyes when closed do not charge the brain. In āsanās the eyes are open, they penetrate outwards. In Prāṇāyāma they are closed and penetrate inwards. The eyes are the windows of the brain, the ears are the windows of the mind. The brain is conscious, the heart unconscious. Which is foremost, conscious or subconscious, when you do Viparīta Daṇḍāsana or Setu Bandha? Subconscious! In āsanās, making the subconscious conscious is meditation.

There should be no air bubbles in the system. Water fills any shape evenly. We should be doing likewise when doing the āsanās.

Consciousness should touch equally. Everything is one when all is touching equally.

Q. *My legs are different in Śāvāsana. One rolls out more.*

A. Lie in Śāvāsana. When I press down on your hip and align your pelvis, the legs roll out equally.

Q. *When you refer to the inner body are you referring to the consciousness?*

A. The mind is like a computer: a piece of it discriminates. It is the reasoning mind. Yogis have defined the mind like the other essential organs. The reasoning mind causes you to look inwards.

For Yogis the consciousness has three parts: mind, intelligence, and sense of touch. The mind gives information that something is wrong. Then the intellect shows what is wrong — the muscles are different. The discriminating mind is the educating mind. When the *I* covers the whole body the *I* is the subject. This is the inner body.

[*Mr. Iyengar calls the student with the problem in Sarvāṅgāsana forward. The consciousness fluctuates from one leg to the other. He shows how the mind and body should come together. Until the two become harmonious the consciousness is not in the leg.*]

When I am teaching I compartmentalize what I am teaching. Then it has to be put together. The pupil has to come up to the level of the teacher. The teacher has to challenge the pupil. The pupil has to bring the teacher to silence. When the pupil is working correctly there is no need for the teacher to speak. A half-empty vessel makes a lot of noise. You are all half-full — I have to make a lot of noise. Until you are full I cannot remain silent.

In my class, when a pupil is in need of help, if I do not help I am doing evil. Not correcting is inviting an action some years later, it affects my karma. When a teacher sees something wrong and does not correct it, that is evil. A true yogi does not find fault with others. Yoga is now taught in America for AIDS because when I taught some stu-



dents, they improved; I gave them some years of life. I took an AIDS student here. I taught him outside on the balcony. When I adjusted him I only shouted at the class, I did not touch the class, I only shouted "Do this, do that" to them. Only I touched him, I put nobody else at risk. The student used his own equipment and washed it after class.

Q. *Could you explain about the tempo of the class and how you deal with the different levels?*

A. I go step by step so that stability can be gained, increasing the tempo as intelligence increases. You should do backbends as I showed Śavāsana, with the conscious mind directed everywhere. The tempo is set by looking for the weaknesses of everyone. It is the intellectual tempo, not the physical tempo.

Q. *My ankles are very weak and they tremble in Prasārita Pādottanāsana. What is wrong?*

A. Your knees roll inward as you bend forward.

Q. *I don't understand how the shoulders move in Virābhadrāsana I.*

A. Do the posture. The upper arms are not stretching, they are projecting forward. See how the arms become straight and the shoulder blades move into the body when I put a pole behind the neck

and in front of each bicep. The flesh lifts, the skin descends and the shoulder blades move in, not up.

Another common fault, when you lift the arms with the feet together, is allowing the thighs and pelvis to move forwards as you lift the arms.

Mr. Iyengar then spoke for a short time:

If you understand the simple postures — stabilizing — then, in complicated postures, you cannot make mistakes. Each position should give you feedback: is the reaction coming? Is it a two-way path? The development is there then. There is a conative and cognitive reaction. Many students do not react to action. If they feel a slight movement, they think they are doing well. The nerves and cells send messages but you are caught in the brain. You have no time to receive the action. Impede the brain, then think: *Is cognizance there?* In Śīrṣāsana, for example, we think how the right leg is working. We have no time to think of the left leg. The sole of one foot is working. You should also ask why is the other foot not working? This work is known as mental discipline, it is using the body to train the mind. Patañjali says sweetness leads to liking and pains to aversion: joy leads to desires. Patañjali says *I enjoy* is not Yoga. A student said *I feel nothing. Make me do it in a hard way.* Then he felt what the posture could do.

This is cognizance. There should be reaction to the action. Just doing is not Yoga. Think of the center wall

of your body computer: you should spread from that. The sun's rays penetrate: Yoga should be like the sun, penetrating, making it a spiritual and mental practice. If you stretch the nerves, measure how the movement flows, it brings warmth. You have to adjust to feel the warmth all over. It is a judgment of the mind, it is a oneness — fibers, spindles, skin, nerves and bones. The structural body is the middle portion.

A child is born with straight limbs. It is the parents who allow it to develop wrongly, with bow legs or knock knees. You need to tuck the muscles nearer the bone. There should be no under- or over-stretching, no dullness on one side of the leg or the other. Until you know the maximum function, the oneness, you cannot have full health. Ask yourself why one muscle is heavy and the other light. From this realization comes.

Q. *I have tinnitus. What can I do?*

A. Ringing in the ears is caused by wax, liquid in the ears or closing of the bones. All these things could be avoided. The ear should remain circular. When going into inverted poses you should make sure the center of the ear is perpendicular. The lower and middle head should be lower than the top of the back of the head. In all poses, watch the center of the ear. When you turn your head the ears should remain round. If the ears are heavy in Sarvāṅgāsana check if the skin is



moving from the base of the neck to the head. Continually check, re-examine and question the mind. If you extend the center of the neck more than the sides, it brings deafness. You should have alignment, equal balance in the stretches. Healthy can become unhealthy by wrong use of the mind. You should do everything with a busy head, empty of everything except polishing the postures.

Q. *What Yoga postures should you give to people with emotional disturbances?*

A. Śīrṣāsana, Viparīta Daṇḍāsana, Setu Bandha Sarvāṅgāsana, Adho Mukha Vr̥kṣāsana, Ūrdhva Dhanurāsana, Halāsana. Halāsana and Sarvāṅgāsana can be repeated, fast, ten times to take off dejection. Emotional disturbance comes from the chest rather than the brain. For the blood to circulate well and the organs of perception to function well, the chest needs to be open. Short Kumbhaka with positive sound brings back confidence. It should be done with fineness but with more sound.

Q. *Why, when lying in Śavāsana, does it take so long for me to calm my mind?*

A. You need weights on you from your feet to your head, then restfulness will come. The weights send the nerves in a different direction so realization will come. It will only come

through the nervous system, not physiologically. Introverts need positive movements to shift the blood: extroverts, the nerves extend, there is no emptiness, put on the pressure of a weight and the nerves recede backwards. Weights are an indirect way of calming the mind. The direct method is using the mind itself. You can use the mind extravagantly, using inner strength.

Q. *What causes shaking after Śavāsana?*

A. It is relaxation with stress, not freedom. You try to relax by keeping the nerves taut. Weights on the legs from thighs to calves will help.

Q. *I have a lot of tension in my throat.*

A. It is the tongue, stress on the tongue. Examine your tongue in the various postures - it becomes thick and tense in Paschimottānāsana, it moves to the side in Trikoṇāsana. In all postures, the tongue should remain relaxed and thin. Keep the inner body quiet. This is why it is not physical yoga, but mental yoga.

Q. *How do you cope with the frustration because we are all so slow?*

A. If I hadn't faced frustration all my life I would not be teaching you now. I create frustration in you. When you are dejected I lift you up by coming to

your aid. I also use strong hands. How many times I explain. A hit means cognizance, the hit changes from person to person because different parts weaken. When the part moves my frustration is gone.

Q. *Why am I not stiff after your classes?*

A. Because you surrendered to me. A man who knows the subject can explain, a person who comes to learn from you cannot judge your work, he is stupid if he thinks he can. Don't get carried away by praise, re-do postures a dozen times when things are wrong and knowledge will come. Don't practice thoughtlessly. If you read the posture line by line you will learn.

Q. *I have HIV-positive students. How do I work with them?*

A. Standing poses drain HIV-positive people, they have little strength. They can do Trikoṇāsana, Ardha Chandrāsana and Pārs̥vottānāsana, these are the least draining. These people have a wetness in the genital organs. Drying postures have to be used — Ūrdhva Dhanurāsana, Viparīta Daṇḍāsana. I have a student who discharged blood every morning. I gave her drying postures and now she has no discharge. How the āsanās are done is important. They need to be suited to the student — Śīrṣāsana, Sarvāṅgāsana, Viparīta Daṇḍāsana — not Uṣṭrāsana or Śalabhāsana.



Q. *Can you comment on the āsanas and the immune system.*

A. Yoga keeps cells healthy and supplies blood to the cells, increasing the defensive system. With a poor defensive system, diseases will come. Yoga educates the cells. Cells live for a short period - do we make full use of them? People's cells now are like stillborn children, stress and strain sap energy. No other system can equal Yoga to build up the nervous system. There are many types of cells - Iyengar Yoga does not neglect any of them, physical or mental. By simply sitting in meditation the cells will not function well.

Q. *What āsanas are good for diabetes?*

A. They are given in *Light on Yoga* — no other book gives groups of āsanas for diseases. You need a group, not a single āsana: cycles of exercises to tone the organs should be known. People do not understand how the organs befriend each other. The cause of diseases should be known, also the symptoms. Work from this: which āsanas affect which part? Give a little thought how to work.

Many think non-production of insulin is the cause of diabetes. The liver is the important organ. There is no disease if the liver is healthy, it makes the other organs last forever. Heart and kidney trouble stem from the liver. It is the largest organ, the hardest to tone. It holds sugar, and

if it cannot, the sugar goes to the blood and urine. Look at the person. If the liver bulges on the right, work on the outside. In Bharadvājāsana the inner side is pushed to the outside and made to move. In Marīchyāsana the outer edges are pushed and made to pump the center. Do a cycle of exercises to tone every side, let nothing escape. That is the way to do the āsanas.

Q. *After Prāṇāyāma I felt puffed up on my right side.*

A. The outer edge of your shoulder blade is lifted, the lung on that side doesn't fill. Turn the weaker lung to the outer edge of the shoulder blade. The right and left sides should be equally active. Discipline the diaphragm.

Q. *Why can't I do Prāṇāyāma?*

A. It is impossible for you to do Prāṇāyāma. Your spine is caved in, there is a ditch in the middle, the breath stagnates. For one or two years do not attempt to do Prāṇāyāma. Do Setubandha Sarvāṅgāsana and Vipariṭa Daṇḍāsana. Hit your chest forward and expand it sideways, with your head eight inches above the ground. Also do Ūrdhva Dhanurāsana looking up at the ceiling and keep your chin well tucked into the chest.

Q. *I have epilepsy. What should I do?*

A. Do Viloma Prāṇāyāma. Even inverted poses keep it

away, then forward bends. The brain needs oxygen, you must supply oxygen to the brain. After practicing Yoga people get warnings which were not there before. The warnings are an indication that the brain senses an attack. Before you did Yoga you would not have known. This time, when you sense an attack coming on, do Viloma. The attack will not be strong. You will have supplied oxygen to the brain. You can also do Vipariṭa Daṇḍāsana, but be cautious. Use supports or you may get injured when the attack comes on. Standing poses will hasten the attack.

Q. *When we do Marīchyāsana III, when turning the trunk to the right, you told us to lengthen the left side of the waist and shorten the right side. Did I understand you correctly?*

A. Yes. You have to observe which pose works on which part of the spine, only then do you understand twists. In Padmāsana different parts of the spine move from those in Paschimottānāsana. Observe also the movement of the spine in Vīrāsana, Baddhakoṅāsana, Upaviṣṭakoṅāsana. In Baddhakoṅāsana, when you turn, the outer spine moves, not the inner. You also use this pose for slipped disk as the pain comes on the outer edge. In Upaviṣṭa Koṅāsana the outer buttock bone remains on the floor. Never turn the leg with your spine. Try these poses before you do Marīchyāsana III.



Q. *When I am doing Prāṇāyāma I am tremulous.*

A. You are a beginner to Prāṇāyāma. When you become tremulous it means you are unconsciously using the fibers of the chest by the force of your mind. You use will-power. As you breathe in, your intelligence has to see how your lungs expand. They should expand without hardening. When you hit the bronchial tubes fast, there is turbulence. The bronchioles are porous. The breath has to be injected like a needle. It has to go into the hole like a needle. If you use force the holes block and you cannot breathe. To stop the trembling you should do one or two breaths and then wait, breathing normally. The more you attempt, the worse the trembling will get. It is similar to contracting the gross muscles, control those and the disturbance will cease. Your intelligence should see if the breath is passing through the holes of the bronchioles. Passivity is a must! In inhalation, keep the cells passive — as in Padmāsana, similarly in breathing.

Q. *What is the difference between teacher and Guru?*

A. A teacher gives out what they have been asked to instruct. A guru works for the upliftment of the student. I use a direct path — a slap. It will enable the student to correct the mistake

on the spot. Now or never is the character of the guru. I have to sharpen the student. I don't ask, is it *pleasant*? Pleasant is no good if it doesn't come. I ask, *Is it true*? Now

or never? *Perhaps* is no good. It is not one day or the other. *Perhaps* is the terminology of power. It brings you into *time*. Words may change but the meaning should not change.

