



# TABLE of CONTENTS

**WEEK 1: Vertical Extension, Horizontal Expansion.....3**  
**WELCOME**  
**IYENGAR PRINCIPLES**  
**PROPS AT HOME**  
**POSES**  
**SUTRA**  
**HOMEWORK**

**WEEK 2: Health and Awareness.....11**  
**WELCOME**  
**POSES**  
**HOMEWORK**

**WEEK 3: Integrity of Movement and Balance.....14**  
**WELCOME**  
**POSES**  
**HOMEWORK**

**WEEK 4: Lightness and Ease.....18**  
**WELCOME**  
**POSES**  
**HOMEWORK**

<b>WEEK 5: Effort and Effortlessness.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>WELCOME</b>	
<b>POSES</b>	
<b>SUTRA</b>	
<b>HOMEWORK</b>	
<b>WEEK 6: Body as Bow, Asana as Arrow, Soul as Target.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>WELCOME</b>	
<b>POSES</b>	
<b>SUTRA</b>	
<b>HOMEWORK</b>	
<b>MORE ABOUT CARRIE.....</b>	<b>27</b>

## WEEK 1: Vertical Extension, Horizontal Expansion

WELCOME!



Woodblock painting: Katsushika Hokusai

Welcome to our theme for this week! Your yoga practice is a low-stakes context in which to explore, experiment, let loose, and let go of all the ties that bind us so tightly to our identities. Your yoga practice is a place where it is OK to be as you are. As the educator Parker Palmer wrote in *The Courage to Teach*: "The human soul [however you choose to define this] does not want to be fixed, it wants simply to be seen and heard." Sure, there are aspects of ourselves we are working with, learning about, cultivating, and educating in practice—yet it is essential that your practice space be one where you can also be who and as you are. It is a place to let go of the misconception that you need to be different, are not OK, or not worthy of doing work that sometimes feels like play.

Something as simple as embodying expansiveness from the feet to the breath can feel awkward or even scary. Many people have been taught to keep their head down, their limbs and

abdominal region in; to comply and conform to someone else's idea of what they should look or be like. We are going to deliberately explore embodying different ways of breathing and being.

I love the woodblock paintings of Hokusai (see the image above) because they contain both movement and stillness. For instance, in this painting of Mount Fuji, the mountain was once an active volcano, and now it stands so placid and expansive, a home for so much life. Pick any image you like that can help you visualize and experiment—or play with different images. It really doesn't matter. Give yourself the opportunity to extend, expand, and embody feelings of spaciousness. Explore this theme with your breath as well. Inhale with a horizontal expansiveness, and exhale through the entire length of your body. Carry these qualities of horizontal expansion and vertical elongation into your Savasana (Corpse Pose) by giving yourself plenty of room to expand and unfold upon the floor—like the immense, wide base of a beautiful mountain. Remember you are, like the mountain, a multidimensional entity. Live and breathe into your multidimensionality.

Like Hokusai once said, “Stay open, stay curious, and there is no end to seeing.”

You can start to embrace this theme by getting a jumpstart on the reading and journal work for this week (below). At the end of the week, we'll give you some asana experiments to conduct!

## **IYENGAR PRINCIPLES**

This course emphasizes the experiential, creative nature of Iyengar Yoga, allowing you to adapt the practice to any body type. But at its roots, Iyengar Yoga has several universal principles that Iyengar teachers around the world embrace and interpret through asana, pranayama, meditation, and other yogic practices. It's worth touching on those foundational principles before moving deeper into the playful side of the practice. We'll incorporate some of these as we move through the course.

- Pose and repose: Learn to pause after action
- Do your actions on the exhalation: There are exceptions
- Observation, action, and reflection: Be mindful of how you move
- Foundation, or base, first: Start from the ground up
- Increase awareness as your practice evolves
- Balance stability and mobility in every pose or action
- Move your awareness from the periphery to the core, then from the core to the periphery

- Centralize and decentralize: Change your base to make it wider or narrower to help bring greater freedom and stability to your experience with yoga
- Oppositional forces and opposing actions also bring stability
- Sequencing, timing, intricacies are key: Pay attention to these, as each can have a powerful effect on your experience.
- Focus on your center of gravity and sense of direction as you practice
- The weak part is the source of the action: Use yoga to strengthen weak areas and to relax tense ones
- Observe cause and effect: Ask yourself, "What if?" ("What if I did it this way? What if I tried it that way?" and "What am I doing, how am I doing it, and why am I doing it?")

## PROPS AT HOME

### Benches



Need help going deeper into your backbend or opening through the chest? Or maybe you want to isolate these areas and are looking for additional support as you move into such poses. Instead of a bolster or blocks, you can use any old bench.

## Belts



If you are looking for assistance in reaching your toes or keeping your legs together in restorative poses, grab an actual belt or even a tie instead of a yoga-specific strap.

## Pillows and Blankets



You can also substitute pillows and blankets for a yoga bolster. Sometimes this is the best option, as you can adjust height more easily.

## Books



No yoga blocks on hand? Try using books. If this is uncomfortable, you can always layer in blankets.

## Chairs



Most chairs with open or cut-out backs can replace a standard metal Iyengar Yoga chair (a folding chair with the back popped out). And there are hundreds of ways chairs can help you access new poses, go deeper in others, and support stellar alignment.

## Stools



A low stool can replace blocks that you might otherwise use for support in supine backbends.

## POSES

Tadasana (Mountain Pose)

Utthita Trikonasana (Extended Triangle Pose)

Utthita Hasta Padasana (Extended Hands and Feet Pose)

Virabhadrasana II (Warrior Pose II)

Utthita Parsvakonasana (Extended Side Angle Pose)

## SUTRA

### Sutra 1.28

*taj-japah tad-artha-bhavanam* [By its repetition and the reflection (of feeling) on its meaning, the citta (mind) becomes one-pointed.]

## HOMEWORK

### Asana

- 1) Stretch your heart and your intelligence—and not just your body—by changing your BASE in the following asana experiments:

- Try each of the below explorations in both Utthita Trikonasana (Extended Triangle Pose) and Virabhadrasana I (Warrior Pose I). (Recap: The base is what is touching the ground.) As you shift your base, trace awareness from your base, up, and throughout the body, in an effort to experience and recognize the relationships among the different parts of your body. Remember: The whole is greater than the sum of the parts, but influenced by them. Observe how the base affects the parts, and the whole.
- Centralize and decentralize by bringing your feet closer together, then wider.
- Use the wall, a block, bolster, or chair to change your base in some way. What happens? Observe how a change in one part of your body affects the other parts, as well as different aspects of your embodiment, such as your breath or state of mind.
- Next, change your limb position in some way (for example, turn one foot further out, bend one leg or the other, or change your arm position in some way) and observe how the position of your limbs affects your core. How does this change your experience of yourself in the pose? Remain aware of the effects on your breath and mind—not just the body.

**2)** Now try entering and exiting these poses differently. For example, try moving into Utthita Trikonasana from Tadasana (Mountain Pose), then from Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-Facing Dog Pose), and then from Prasarita Padottanasana (Wide-Legged Standing Forward Bend). How does that change the form of the pose? And your experience of body, breath, and mind?

**3)** We explored vertical extension and horizontal expansion this week. Next choose a different purpose (*artha*) and a feeling or essence (*bhavana*) as you do these poses. How does this change of intention change your experience?

**4)** Try a different pace or rhythm as you explore these (as well as other poses) in your practice this week. Move quickly sometimes, and very slowly at other times. Explore staying in each pose a little longer than you normally would.

### **Reading and Journaling**

**1) Read *Light on Life*, Chapter 1.**

**2) Journal assignment:** Can you think of a time in your life when you felt particularly grounded and expansive? Or when you acted with a deep sense of purpose and feeling? How does your body feel as you try to remember or write about those experiences?

## **WEEK 2: Health and Awareness (Periphery to Core, Core to Periphery)**

### **WELCOME!**

Geeta Iyengar, B.K.S. Iyengar's daughter and a yoga teacher in her own right, once said that poses are like mantras. As we repeat them, we do so with artha (purpose) and bhavana (feeling or contemplation). Patanjali describes this process in sutra 1:28. There it refers to the repetition of a mantra, specifically, the mantra Om. Each repetition is done with presence and awareness, so it doesn't become mechanical. Our purpose is to stay present and to actively notice new things. The practice can be purposeful and it can also be playful. At different times, you might emphasize different things. The point is to practice with presence and a willingness to engage with the whole of yourself, however you are, wherever you are.

We can notice how our bodies are in contact with the earth, where and how we are touching its surface. We can also notice the sensations in our viscera, and sense the rate and rhythm of our heart and its relationship to our breath. We can notice how we are physically mirroring, and hence resonating with, other people. There is so much to notice from the periphery to the core and back again.

When my father was dying, I was fortunate to be with him. I was so scared, and felt like a being at sea without a lighthouse. And then I noticed him, his presence. He was totally clear and present. He was a lighthouse. I remember thinking, "I can't feel my feet, or my breath." Yet by abiding with these feelings, with this uneasiness, I was indeed able to be present to him, and to myself, and to stand there with him as he looked at me from his bed in the intensive care unit. And as brief as those moments of presence probably were, they made it feel as if time itself had expanded and slowed down enough to hold the two of us together. I am so grateful. In a way, this experience was like practicing Tadasana (Mountain Pose). All those practices in which we learn to pay attention to what is going on, without judgment, again and again, show us that we need to come back to the base, come back to the breath. Even when it is difficult to remain present, all those little daily efforts will, at some unforeseen moment in time, grace us. This is the gift of yoga. Yoga graces us when we need it most, and when and where we least expect it. The little daily efforts are never wasted, if our efforts are directed toward developing greater levels of awareness.

### **POSES**

Eka Pada Pavanamuktasana (One-legged Wind Relieving Pose)

Supta Padangusthasana (Reclining Hand-to-Big Toe Pose)

Dandasana (Staff Pose)

Uthita Trikonasana (Extended Triangle Pose)

Arta Chandrasana (Half-Moon Pose)

Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend)

Adho Muka Svanasana (Downward Facing Dog)

Supta Baddha Konasana (Reclining Bound Angle Pose)

Savasana (Corpse Pose)

## HOMEWORK

### Asana

- 1) How do the poses in this sequence relate to last week's sequence in terms of shape and actions?
- 2) What if you were to change the order of the poses and try the standing asanas at the beginning of the sequence? How does that affect your experience? (Be specific.)
  - Try three different orders. Ask yourself: What if I try it this way? Why am I choosing this? You might not know—that is OK. Find out by doing. (Remember to pause and reflect on your experience while you are having it.)
  - Try folding in some of the poses from last week's practice. What did you choose? Why? Where did you place the poses that you added? How did it affect your experience?
- 3) How could you use a chair or wall for some of these poses? Why did you do what you did?
- 4) Try extension and expansion (from Week 1) as your *artha* and *bhavana* (purpose and feeling) as you practice Week 2's sequence.
- 5) Explore the difference between "touch and go," or shorter holds and transitions, and some slightly longer holds and transitions. Keep exploring how variations in rhythm and timing can change your experience.

### Journaling

Proprioception is often defined as one's ability to sense the relative position of neighboring parts of the body, as well as the strength of effort being employed to move those parts. It is how we know where our body parts are in relation to each other, their position, location, how they are moving, and more. Interoception is sometimes defined as the sense or awareness of our body's internal state or physiological condition.

There are specific nerve receptors for both proprioception and interoception, and you can read up on these terms if you like. But in the meantime, consider your core as something more than the muscles that support your trunk and spine. Consider your core as your visceral awareness, how you feel inside—in your gut, if you will. Your core (or the core of your being) might be something even deeper than that, something undefinable. Consider the possibilities!

Now look at the relationship between proprioceptive awareness (again, where your body parts are and the quality of or effort in their movements) and your interoception awareness (or how you feel inside, physiologically). Do you sense a relationship? Can you think of a time when you

were acutely aware of both? The story I told about my father is a time when I felt acutely aware of both. Did having this awareness help you navigate in any way? Did it help you stay present to yourself and the circumstance at hand?

Write down any thoughts or impressions.

## WEEK 3: Integrity of Movement and Balance

### WELCOME!



*Photo: Ansel Adams*

I am fascinated by the process by which we, as human animals, develop and maintain our sense of balance, or equilibrioception. Our capacity to balance and not fall over when standing or moving (or doing yoga) is the result of a complex process. It requires the integration of several body systems working together. Many of us are familiar with how our eyes or visual system can help us balance. Our vestibular system, or ears, help as well, as does our proprioceptive system (the body's sense of where it is in space), which we looked at last week. What I love about the picture of the juniper tree photo above, by Ansel Adams, is that it depicts something that is in harmonious balance in its environment with all the unique conditions and forces (like strong winds) that are continuously acting upon it.

There are many ways to play with balance and thus enhance your ability to balance. It is a huge topic, and one with which I have a personal connection (as many of you do, I am sure). In the past several years, I have witnessed the devastating effects that loss of balance can exact on a life, in terms of independence, confidence, and well-being. My father died from a head injury that resulted from a fall, and my mother (who is legally blind) is now in a skilled nursing facility due to a fracture resulting from a fall. She had done very well for a long time, and had excellent balance, but a bout of severe depression after my dad died resulted in her not moving,

socializing, and doing the activities she loved. She was not eating well either, and was gradually losing the balance skills that were so essential for her as someone who has visual impairment. And though she is doing much better now, there is no mistaking how important it is to stay as strong, agile, and as engaged as possible throughout our lives. We often take much of this for granted when we are young, but it is never too early to pay closer attention and work more deliberately (and playfully) on this critical skill of balance.

There are many factors that contribute to balance challenges as we age, and I am not going to go into them in this course. However, let's do what we can do to maintain, and even improve, this essential skill. In this week's practice, I focus on only a very small piece of this intricate process. We will place a strong emphasis on the musculoskeletal component and specifically on how to work on developing strength and awareness while standing on one leg.

Our emphasis this week is like a tiny grain of sand in the world of what it means to be able to balance. However, as William Blake wrote, you can "See the world in a grain of sand." The part holds the whole, even though the whole is so much greater than the sum of its parts.

To see the world in a grain of sand  
And a heaven in a wild flower  
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand  
And eternity in an hour  
—William Blake, "Auguries of Innocence"

## **POSES**

Salamba Sarvangasana (Supported Shoulderstand)  
Mandalasana (Circle Pose)  
Baddha Konasana (Bound Angle Pose)  
Arta Chandrasana (Half-Moon Pose)  
Uthita Trikosana (Extended Triangle Pose)  
Virabradrosana III (Warrior Pose 3)  
Vimanasana (Airplane Pose)  
Virabradrosana I (Warrior Pose 1)  
Eka Pada Adho Mukha Vrksasana (Standing Splits)  
Dandasana (Staff Pose)  
Adha Mukha Vrksasana (Handstand)  
Supta Baddha Konasana (Reclining Bound Angle Pose)  
Savasana (Corpse Pose)

## **HOMEWORK**

### **Asana and Movement**

**1)** Our direct perception of the relationship between the outer hip area of our forward leg to the heel of the back leg is a part of many standing, inverted, and seated poses. Look back

through the previous weeks' sequences and find all the places that this relationship occurs. (Explore this in the process of doing the poses!) This is the concept of LINKING. Linking actions—within a pose, from pose to pose, and from practice to practice—is about exploring relationships. As we explore linking, we find deeper patterns of connection. This helps with the process of integration.

**2)** How might you include a few of the poses and practices from this balance experiment into our sequences from Week 1 and Week 2? Where would you place these poses and why?

**3)** Do at least one one-legged standing pose every day. Introduce variety to how you explore or practice the pose so you stay fresh and challenged. It is not about being perfect; but about creating new neural connections. Try your balance pose with your eyes closed. Change your head position by looking up toward the ceiling, or to the right or left. Explore a different position for your arms (as we did in the play section in Week 2). How do these variations affect your capacity to balance?

**4)** Observe how you are breathing in your poses and in your life's activities. Notice how the way you are breathing (rate, volume, placement, etc.) might differ in different contexts. Explore breathing in a way that allows your respiratory diaphragm to widen and descend as you inhale. And then on the exhale, you will feel your waist and ribs narrow. Breathing in this manner (low and wide) lowers your center of gravity and might help you feel more stable, and calmer. Clavicular breathing (breathing too high in the chest and shoulder area) raises the center of the body and might make you feel less steady or anxious. Explore your breathing process and see what helps you balance.

**5)** Also observe how much you are relying on your arms to get up and down from a chair, or the floor. Do you reflexively reach for, or lean on, the railing when climbing stairs? When getting up and down from a step stool, for instance, do you always raise or lower yourself with the same leg? Learn to pause when doing these activities and watch your patterns. They might reveal dormant weaknesses and areas that need attention even before an issue manifests itself.

**6)** Patanjali (in Sutra 2.4) says that the *kleshas* (afflictions) are either *supta* (dormant), *tanu* (thin), *vichinna* (alternating), or *udaranam* (fully blown). Learn to observe and notice the tendency to favor one limb over another. Learn to look for the weak places—the thin or alternating tendencies to shift away from an area of weakness, or a place of adversity. B.K.S. Iyengar says these weak parts or places must become the source of the action. We are learning to seek the areas of darkness or ignorance and shine the light of our awareness into them. Thus, they become stronger, healthier, and more alive with the nutrients that come from our affectionate attention.

## Reading and Journaling

**Journal assignment:** Write about balance. How do you explore this concept in your practice and in your daily movements? How do you explore this concept in the larger context of your

life? Write about the fears, hopes, and feelings that arise with this contemplation.

**Reading:** *Light on Life*, chapter 2

**Optional reading:** *A Leg To Stand On* by Oliver Sacks

## WEEK 4: Lightness and Ease

### WELCOME!



Woodblock painting: Katsushika Hokusai

"There was a time when I believed there was nothing under my skin but light, and if you cut me, I would shine."—Billy Collins, "On Turning Ten"

I love this poem, and especially the line above. Do you remember a time in your life, maybe in childhood, when the power of your imagination and belief was something akin to a type of transcendence? Through imagination and play, children, in their innocence, have a strange access to the force and potency of mind. The Billy Collins poem "On Turning Ten" articulates this so poignantly. We grow out of this power as we go to school, sit in desks and practice conformity. However, we do not have to. We do not have to lose our capacity to play, to utilize our imagination, and to tap into the transformative power of mind.

B.K.S. Iyengar writes in *Light on Life*, "Don't think of yourself as a small, compressed suffering thing. Think of yourself as graceful and expanding, no matter how impossible that may seem at the time." This statement expresses the power of the imagination to reframe experience and hence change our experience of it. This ability to reframe, re-imagine, and create change within the body and mind is one of the many gifts of yoga.

We can imagine ourselves doing something (very specifically) and begin to ignite those movement centers in our brain. We can expand and extend beyond the perceivable end of our body and experience a different sense of our embodiment. We can, in the words of Iyengar, think light and feel light.

In this week's practice, we will explore some uplifting poses and practices. Explore your imagination as you practice. Play and seek, seek and play! Does how you think affect how you feel? Can you imagine that there really is nothing under your skin but light, or space? How does this change your breath and your felt sense of yourself?

I will also ask you to move as if being carried by a great wave: your body and breath synchronizing and flowing, the whole of your being uplifted by this natural rhythmic movement. I hope this painting of a great wave by Hokusai (above) captures your imagination as it does mine. I feel that it depicts both movement and stillness, and the ebbing and flowing of natural forces that are continuously shaping us. And we too are a force, with the capacity to use the power of mind, breath, and imagination to shape our experience.

## **POSES**

Paryankasana (Couch Pose)

Swastikasana (Auspicious Pose)

Purvottanasana (Upward Plank Pose)

Urdva Dhanurasana (Wheel/Upward Facing Bow Pose)

Viparita Karani (Legs Up the Wall Pose)

Salamba Sarvangasana (Supported Shoulderstand)

Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward Facing Dog)

Adho Mukha Virahasana (Child's Pose/Downward Facing Hero Pose)

Gomukasana (Cow Face Pose)

Savasana (Corpse Pose)

## **HOMEWORK**

### **Asana**

**1)** How can you use props to help create a sense of lightness in body and in mind? Are there certain areas that, when elevated, are more conducive to feelings of lightness?

**2)** Try the angular leg position (as we did for this week's practice of Utthita Trikonasana) with other standing poses, such as Virabhadrasana 2 and Utthita Parsvakonasana. What happens when you do this? How does your experience of the pose change when you change the base in this manner?

**3)** Try including inversions or inversion prep in your daily practice. Do Sirsasana prep and

Sirsasana after you have done enough poses to wake up and enliven your body, especially the shoulders and shoulder-blade area. In Iyengar Yoga, Sarvangasana comes after Sirsasana. It can be calming, cooling, and relaxing for your nervous system when you practice Sarvangasana near the end of your sequence. These inverted poses can also be done as a separate practice.

NOTE: In Iyengar Yoga we do not traditionally practice inverted poses or strenuous poses during menstruation. If you are menstruating, substitute a supported supine pose, forward bend, or do shoulder work, such as Garudasana or Gomukasana arms, instead of these inverted poses.

**4)** How might you use the principles of Center of Gravity, Sense of Direction, and the Weak Part is the Source of the Action with the poses that we have explored this week? Would your prop set-up or approach change? How? Why? Feel free to explore these pose without the use of props as well. Remember: The body is your first prop, according to B.K.S. Iyengar.

**5)** Which poses or what type of movements uplift you? Which poses or movements help you to relax? Can you combine these two qualities in your practice simultaneously? Remember to take care and eliminate or substitute a supported version of any of the poses that you find too challenging.

### **Reading and Journaling**

**Journaling:** Reflect on the times in your life (or practice) when you feel the most light-hearted and uplifted. Consider the context that surrounds these experiences. We are never separate from context.

**Optional reading/watching:** Watch the TED talk called “Your Body Language Shapes Who You Are,” by Harvard Psychologist Amy Cuddy. Or read her book *Presence*, which explores and expands upon the ideas and research that she describes in her TED talk.

## **WEEK 5: Effort and Effortlessness**

### **WELCOME!**

This is such a fascinating topic. I get excited just thinking about it! It is all about practice—the quality of practice, and about how we learn. Patanjali, author of the Yoga Sutra, defines practice as effort in sutra 1.13. Later, in the second chapter of the Yoga Sutra, he says that when the effort becomes effortless, then the infinite is reached.

In the essay "Effort, Awareness, and Joy" from the Tree of Yoga, B.K.S. Iyengar also describes practice as requiring the effort of analysis. He says that in analysis, energy is (at first) depleted. How true! When we are first learning something new and challenging, like a new physical skill, for instance, we do experience fatigue more readily, both physical and mental. The process of learning can be more effortful and that is to be expected because, as Patanjali says, practice is *yanto*, or effort, and *prayatna* (sutra 2.47), which is persevering effort. This type of deliberate practice and persevering effort is essential when learning difficult things. Then, as we gain some proficiency with what we have learned, we can relax a bit (*shaitiliya*) and, as B.K.S. Iyengar writes in the essay mentioned above, "we no longer feel the effort as effort, we feel the effort as joy."

As we become more efficient in our practices, things will flow more easily. However, if we are interested in continuing to learn and grow, then our practice or learning endeavors will at times be somewhat effortful. And then, over time, less so. Practice is like that. A dance of effort and effortlessness. I love practice. I find it intriguing to contemplate just how many ways there are to approach a practice as well as the concept of effort and effortlessness.

For me, play is an element that factors greatly in this process of practice, as well as in the process of transforming effort into that paradoxical term called effortlessness effort. Play is key for me. It is not a frivolous thing reserved only for children. I think play is essential for all of us as animals and as human beings. We play at sports; we play music; we play imaginatively in theater, dance, and film. Imagine a life without play? Creativity is a form of play. We have played throughout the hundreds of thousands of years of our evolution as a species. Albert Einstein said play was the highest form of research. In fact, he used the concept of combinatory play in his famous thought experiments. Great artists and thinkers often see what they do as play. Not all perhaps, but certainly quite a few do.

And, it is true that effort (as well as effortlessness) is evident in play. Just watch any sporting event. The art of play (to my mind) is especially wonderful because it allows both effort and effortlessness to coexist. It can make the work inherent in deliberate practice more appealing and it can greatly enhance our experience of practice. Play nourishes us and it can help transform the quality of our efforts. It can, in the words of TS Eliot, teach us "to care and not to care" because we are simultaneously totally engaged and committed and yet there is some part of us that knows we are playing and thus not clinging so tightly to outcome. We learn to do and to let go. It is the *abhyasa* (practice) and *vairagya* (detachment) that Patanjali defines in Sutra

1.12. We do what we are doing for the sake (and joy) of doing it--even when it is hard, even when it is difficult. We do it for the love of it. And love is often what makes the really difficult things possible.

## POSES

Vastistahsana (Side Plank Pose)  
Supta Padangusthasana (Reclining Hand-to-Big Toe Pose)  
Utthita Trikonasana (Extended Triangle Pose)  
Bhishmacharyasana (Pose dedicated to Bhishma)  
Urdhva Prasarita Padasana (Upward Extended Foot Pose)  
Urdhva Hastasana (Upward Salute Pose)  
Jathara Parivartanasana (Revolved Abdomen Pose)  
Sankatasana (Difficult Pose)  
Adha Mukha Dandhasana (Plank Pose)  
Bharadvjasana (Pose named after Rishi Bharadvaja)  
Marichyasana 3 (Pose named after Rishi Marichi)  
Arta Chandrasana (Half Moon Pose)  
Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend)  
Parivrtta Arta Chandrasana (Revolved Half-Moon Pose)  
Setu Bandha Sarvangasana (Bridge Pose)  
Savasana (Corpse Pose)

## SUTRA

### Sutra 2.47

*prayatna-saithilya-ananta-samapattibhyam* ([it is accompanied] by the relaxation of tension and the coinciding with the infinite.)

### Sutra 1.13

*tatra sthita yanto'bhyasah* (practice is the exertion [in gaining] stability in that [state of restriction].)

## HOMEWORK

### Asana

**1)** Reflect for a moment on our definition of proprioception from Week 2. Proprioception is our ability to sense the relative position of neighboring parts of the body, as well as the strength of effort being employed to move those parts. Notice the quality of your efforts as you move in your practice this week. Observe without judgement. Observe with curiosity. Observe with affectionate attention. Observe. Notice. Then... experiment with the quality of your effort. Play.

**2)** Play with bringing a quality of effortlessness and relaxation to your eyes, jaw, lips, and

tongue when you are doing something challenging. Does relaxing your senses of perception help you perceive more? And perceive more accurately? Do your arms and legs (or abdominals) seem to work a little better when your jaw is relaxed?

**3)** Ask yourself the question "What happens when..." For instance: "What happens when I soften my eyes in this challenging pose? What happens when I relax my jaw and tongue as I do this difficult thing?"

**4)** Try folding in the supine poses from Week 2 into this sequence. Where did you try them and why? How did your choices affect your experience?

**5)** Which of the abdominal poses is the most challenging for you? How might you play with these poses, or integrate some of them into your regular practice?

**6)** Some of the poses presented (especially the arm balance poses) are more advanced. If you were to work toward the unsupported versions one day, how might you go about that now that you have experienced some aspect of the shape of the pose? Can you feel where you might lack strength, connection, mobility, or stability? How might you work to progressively strengthen these areas? For those of you who do these poses easily or unsupported, can you see that there might be some value in using a support occasionally?

**7)** If a pose (any pose) is difficult for you, try taking support and then gradually, little by little, lessening the external support as you develop the internal support within your own body. Is there a pose that you would like to explore in this way (it doesn't have to be any of these poses)? How might you go about that process?

**8)** Try using movement when you feel stuck. Explore the concept of "touch and go," rather than staying and straining. Or slow way down, as if in slow motion. Over time, you can try staying a little longer in the pose. Explore variations in rhythm.

## **Reading and Journaling**

**Reading:** Read the essay called "Effort, Awareness, and Joy" from The Tree of Yoga by B.K.S Iyengar (you can find a pdf at your resources tab, to the left.)

**Journal assignment:** Remind yourself of the following: It is OK to take support sometimes. Write about a time in your life when you allowed someone or something to support you. How did that feel? How did it feel to be the person providing support to someone who asked for it or really needed it? Is it possible to cultivate self-reliance (in yourself or in another person) and still receive, give, or ask for support when necessary?

## WEEK 6: Body as Bow, Asana as Arrow, Soul as Target

### WELCOME!

This is our final session for this course, and it gets to the very heart of why we practice. Yoga is a great path, a great way—a means and an end in and of itself. It is a great thing that can grace us. Yoga helps us connect to the very core of our being-ness. Yoga helps us connect to this mysterious process called life, to this mysterious process called love. Most importantly, yoga helps us connect to ourselves and each other just as we are.

This is contentment, or *santosa*. In sutra 2.42, Patanjali says, "Through contentment, unexcelled joy is gained." This is the deep, true unexcelled joy that comes from gratitude, from fully embracing and appreciating the gift of having a life, and from giving to each other by having the opportunity to love. We can give the gifts of love, kindness, joy, and compassion to each other, and to ourselves. There is no better way to celebrate the honor and mystery of existence.

The poet Maya Angelou said, "People will forget what you said, they will forget what you did, but they will never forget how you made them feel." This is a good reminder that at the end of the day we will remember how we felt, and we will remember what gave meaning to our lives. We will remember what it felt like to give and receive love, to relax into the flow of it, (even with uncertainty), and to let go of the need to control everything.

As you practice this week, let *santosa* (contentment) be your guide. Give yourself the unexcelled joy of a deep breath. Let the palms of your hands soften and open. Allow your toes and the soles of your feet to spread and listen to the Earth—as if your feet were ears and the Earth were a good friend with a long and astonishing story to tell. Let go into the listening, the feeling, the being, the astonishment.

I have been so honored to have had this opportunity to share my love of yoga, of practice (especially playful practice), and of the profound and brilliant teachings of B.K.S. Iyengar with you for these six weeks. Thank you for sharing your struggles and breakthroughs. Thank you for all the beautiful and inspiring posts on our group Facebook page. Thank you for sharing your insightful questions during our live webinars. And thank you for being the open, curious, fascinating beings that you are.

### POSES

Supta Padangusthasana (Reclining Hand-to-big-toe Pose)

Urdhva Prasarita Padasana (Upward Extended Foot Pose)

Savasana (corpse Pose)

Prasarita Paddottasana (Wide-Legged Forward Bend)

Uttasana (Standing Forward Bend)

Ananthasana (Sleeping Vishnu Pose)

Parsvottnasana (Intense Side Stretch Pose)  
Parivritra Trikonasana (Revolved Triangle Pose)  
Akarna Dhanurasana (Archer Pose)  
Dandasana (Staff Pose)  
Virasana (Hero Pose)  
Supta Virasana (Reclining Hero Pose)  
Baddha Konasana (Bound Angle Pose)  
Sukhasana (Easy Pose)

## SUTRA

### Sutra 2.42

*samtosad-anuttamah sukha-labhah* (Through contentment, unexcelled joy is gained.)

## HOMEWORK

### Asana

- 1) Integrate quiet, restorative, or reflective practices into your weekly practice routine—or more often—if you find these types of practices helpful. Do at least one quiet pose daily, in addition to a daily Savasana.
- 2) Practice a little self-care daily. Let your yoga practice be a form of self-care. Let it nourish you, just like good food, sleep, and relationships do. Let it be essential—even if it is for a short period of time and only a few poses.
- 3) Balance the more challenging poses and practices with those that you find soothing and comforting.
- 4) Balance deliberate practice with playful practice. Be sure to laugh sometimes in your practice. I find this to be very helpful. If we take ourselves too seriously, we might miss something that is profoundly nourishing (delightful). So, as the great poet Jack Gilbert wrote, "We must risk delight!"
- 5) Ask yourself as you practice: What is my bow? What is my arrow? What is my target?

### Reading and Journaling

If you've enjoyed the readings and quotes from this course, you may also want to read the following:

- *When Breath Becomes Air*, by Paul Kalanathi. This book is one of the most beautiful books I have ever read. It simply and eloquently describes the deep joy that comes from the contentment that I believe Patanjali was writing about in Sutra 2.42. It is not considered a "yoga book," but it totally is! Please read it and share it with someone you love.

- *Waking*, by Iyengar teacher Mathew Sanford. Or make time to listen to an interview with him on YouTube. You will be glad that you did.
- *Gratitude*, by Oliver Sacks. This is a short book of four essays that were originally published in The New York Times. These essays are pithy, poetic, and so pristine in their honesty and humanity. They are so beautiful they shimmer. If you struggle with contentment, or feel ill-equipped or like a misfit, these essays are a window into how to practice gratitude for the life that you have—in all its ways, shapes, and forms.

And finally, as you leave this course and take what you've learned into your life—breathe fully, deliberately, and deeply. Breathe into the spaces that you can feel. And in the words of Mathew Sanford, "Breathe into the spaces that you cannot feel. And know that those too, are graceful."

To the grace of this great thing called yoga.

Namaste.



**Carrie Owerko** is a Senior Intermediate Iyengar teacher and continues her studies with the Iyengar family by traveling to India on a regular basis, as well as by continuous in-depth studies with her yoga teacher, Patricia Walden. Before studying yoga, Carrie earned a BFA in dance and theater, graduating from the renowned Neighborhood Playhouse Theater School in NYC. Carrie then spent several years working for a movement, educational, and experimental theater company called The Irondale Ensemble Project. After Irondale, she continued her

inquiry and became a Certified Movement Analyst, completing her studies at The Laban Institute of Movement Studies. She has spent years enthusiastically exploring human movement with the intention of helping people develop clearer, more fully embodied communication and expression. Curiosity, openness, and affection are of utmost importance in her approach to Iyengar Yoga, as is the integration of science, yoga philosophy, and poetic imagination. Most importantly, she loves to explore the relationship of discipline and playfulness and is a firm believer in the power of controlled folly.