

stage, sometimes he moved around a lot in the crowd, sometimes he sat in a chair on the floor level and spoke, more intimately to the students who drew in closer to listen.

One really interesting and moving episode took place when he stopped the class to work with a woman who is an amputee, from the knee down on one leg. There had a trestler for her to work with, (like the one I have in our prop room). We had been working on Ardha Chandrasana (half moon pose) one of those more

difficult balancing poses. He was right at her side, and had all the rest of us stop and observe as he set up props to support her shortened leg and had her balancing on that leg. She was working hard, in a sweat, and clearly very thrilled and nervous to be under his scrutiny, but as she stood on her shorter leg, and reached up with her top arm to open her chest he beamed and proclaimed to all of us, (something to the effect of,) "she was the most courageous person in the room."

"These postures help one to maintain stability in times of difficulty and even when catastrophes occur. When stability becomes a habit, maturity and clarity follow. Stability requires balance...Balance in the body is the foundation for balance in life." **B.K.S. IYENGAR** *Light on Life*

Dear students of Friendship Yoga,

It has been my great pleasure and honor to serve for the past year on the Board of the Maitri Yoga Education Fund, with Craig Willis, Kevin Berbaum, Barbara Eckstein, and Nancy Footner. Because many of you have supported the Education Fund with your gifts, or taken part in events connected to the Fund, I wanted to bring you up to date on what has been accomplished this year.

Craig Willis shepherded us through the process of writing and filing the documents that established Maitri Yoga Education Fund as a non-profit corporation in the State of Iowa. We expect to hear soon that we have been approved by the IRS for tax-exempt status.

The central purpose of the Maitri Yoga Education Fund is to provide ac-

cess to Iyengar yoga education to those who have the motivation to learn and practice but lack the means. The Fund has received donations from more than 15 individuals or couples, and these gifts have made it possible so far to grant three partial tuition scholarships for the Prairiewoods retreat last June and one partial scholarship for this fall's retreat with Lee Sverkerson. Recipients of these scholarships have reciprocated by assisting with classes at Friendship Yoga or by teaching elsewhere in the community.

The Maitri Board sponsors events to raise awareness of the Theresa Semel Memorial Scholarship Fund and of Iyengar yoga. In March, we sponsored a public showing at the Iowa City Public Library of "The Ultimate Freedom," a filmed performance and talk that B.K.S. Iyengar gave in Ann Arbor in

1976. More than 50 people attended and enjoyed both the film and the fellowship, with refreshments courtesy of the Maitri Board.

Our next event will be January 27th at 5:30pm in meeting room A of the Iowa City Public Library. We plan to show a film made during Mr. Iyengar's 2005 visit to Estes Park, Colorado, at the beginning of the national tour for his new book, *Light on Life*. Once again, there will be the opportunity to learn and to feel the support and friendship of our local yoga community.

The Board is grateful to all those who have, through the Maitri Yoga Education Fund, demonstrated that yoga develops community, even as it helps us grow as individuals. Please support our efforts by making a contribution. **A coupon is attached below.**



NEWSLETTER

Winter Issue • 2005

Health begins with firmness in body, deepens to emotional stability, then leads to intellectual clarity, wisdom, and finally the unveiling of the soul. Yoga has a threefold impact on health. It keeps healthy people healthy, it inhibits the development of disease, and it aids recovery from ill health. —B.K.S. Iyengar

Join us the weekend of June 9-11, 2006, for the 8th Annual Friendship Yoga Retreat at Prairiewoods in Hiawatha, Iowa. Mary Obendorfer will be coming from San Diego as our guest teacher.

## From the Director

Nancy Footner DIRECTOR, FRIENDSHIP YOGA, CERTIFIED IYENGAR YOGA INSTRUCTOR

In September, I had the privilege of attending a convention of Iyengar Yoga Teachers and Students at the YMCA Camp in Estes Park, Colorado. The convention was a celebration of the beginning of B.K.S. Iyengar's, (affectionately known as "Guruji"), final visit to the United States in conjunction with the release of his new book *Light on Life*. Although there were eight hundred participants in the convention, many more applications were turned down. I was somewhat apprehensive about how it would feel to be in such a huge class, but I was pleasantly surprised to discover that the convention organizers had done an excellent job of organizing the logistics.

In fact, the numbers (of students) helped to exemplify one of the hallmarks of Mr. Iyengar's brilliant teaching. Traditionally, going back centuries, the lessons of yoga have been conveyed through a teacher/student relationship, more often taking place in the rarified environment of a guru with a few students. One of the most radical of Mr. Iyengar's accomplishments is to have spread yoga throughout the world. Certainly, his classes were normally not as large as the one at Estes Park, but the point is that he was determined to make yoga accessible to the "householder", (as he refers to those of us who hold jobs, have families and have to take out the garbage ourselves every day), and he did so by devising a teaching method, whereby the instructions are so precise, logical, and lucid that you, (no matter what the size of the class), should be able to feel as if the class was just for you.

This teacher/student relationship and the methodology upon which it is structured is the gateway for a much more profound, one might say spiritual experience, which is available to all who are willing to embark on the path

of what Guruji calls the "Inward Journey". *Light on Life*, articulates this journey in very personal terms, is beautifully written, and is, I believe already a classic and unique contribution to the literature of Yoga. It is not a "how to" book, (see *Light on Yoga*, or *Light on Pranayama*), nor is it a book explicating yoga philosophy (see **Light on Yoga Sutras of Patanjali**). The framework of classical Yoga philosophy organizes this new book, but his goal is to describe what he personally encountered in his 70 plus years of uninterrupted practice. The language is modern, accessible, and he is honest in revealing with humor and clarity the "ups and downs" he, himself, has faced over his lifetime. His is a realistic, practical, and compassionate outlook on what challenges we face as we live our ordinary lives, and he has written this book to support and inspire us to seek through yoga, freedom from our human frailties and vulnerabilities and to express his conviction that "spirituality is not some external goal we must seek, but part of the divine core of each of us that we must reveal".

When I saw him in Estes Park in September, Mr. Iyengar looked fantastic, (we should all hope to look so good at 87.) The crowd was excited and enthralled by his presence and he seemed to be equally thrilled to be there and was quite emotional in his response to our enthusiasm. Although a lot of planning had gone into this event because it was to be a teaching convention, the senior teachers were clearly prepared to abdicate to his will and impulses, and, and upon entry, he instantly took control of the program leaving everyone else to pretty much hang on for the ride. Sometimes he was on the

*Continued on back page*

"In our spiritual quest, it is required of us that we develop our body in such a way that it is no longer a hindrance, but becomes our friend." **B.K.S. Iyengar**

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Maitri

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# Up-da Sirsasana

by Jen Dutton

My son Cass's first word, at about seven months, was "up-da." Because my husband, Cass's sister Zoe, and I love talking to each other, and even to ourselves, we all had great expectations about what Cass would add to our never ending stream of conversation a year later. To date though, "up-da," is still about the extent of Cass's spoken vocabulary. He understands what we ask him and the books we read to him before bed time, but he just isn't interested in sharing his thoughts. The meaning of "up-da" as we quickly discovered, is "upside down," and "upside down," is what Cass would like to be a large percentage of the time.

The first time I took Cass to morning story time at the public library, he began to fidget and stand up and make for the electrical sockets, so I pivoted him in my lap until his feet were up and his head was down and he could listen for a minute in the "up-da" position. This worked so well that we have to do a little "up-da" at every story time, though I try to stick it in unobtrusively between books. Cass's dad will sometimes pick Cass up when he comes home from work, hug him and turn him over and dangle him by his ankles, though I hate to watch this. Cass's head is about the size and weight of a bowling ball, but his neck is only about as wide as cardboard toilet paper tube. I'd really like to see him go to college one day with his head still attached.

The interesting thing we have lately discovered, though, is that Cass's love of "up-da," is not limited to his own experience. He shouts excitedly when he sees Elmo or Grover or another *Sesame Street* character reversed, or when someone turns his sister upside down. To his delight, for my Yoga class, I've been practicing a form of "up-da," (*Salamba Sirsasana*) at home, and this has even led him to string two words together—"Mommy up-dah!"—which he shouts as rushes over to stick his fingers in my amazingly upside down eyes. None of the inverted asanas please him quite as much as *Salamba Sirsasana*, though he's willing to help with all of them.

B. K. S. Iyengar talks about the challenges of *Salamba Sirsasana* in his book *Light on Yoga*, stating that "it takes time for the beginner to become oriented to his [or her] surroundings while he [or she] is balancing on his [or her] head" and that "everything will seem at first completely unfamiliar." The benefits of a "precise practice" of *Salamba Sirsasana*, in Iyengar's words, is that "it disciplines the mind and widens the horizons of the spirit." I think some of the disorientation I have felt practicing *Salamba Sirsasana* stems from having defied gravity, one of nature's most universal laws. To a toddler, surrounded by daily on-



slaught of do's and don'ts, a little rule breaking of this kind must be very exciting.

The harder part of *Salamba Sirsasana* in my own practice seems to be the discipline I am beginning to have to muster to make this extraordinary feeling feel ordinary. In other words, the asana in the first days was like the *Enterprise* ride at the state fair, or that bungee chair that drops people to the ground and flips them back up again. Upside down was all that mattered. Now though, the asana is work. I have to talk to myself—rotate the upper thighs inward, press up with the feet, and activate my triceps. I've lost a little bit of innocence of having no other internal dialogue but "whee!" but I don't think I've lost any of the joy. I have also gained some personal confidence from doing something that even my stomach once told me was impossible.

People who practice *Salamba Sirsasana* don't just put themselves on the top of the world, they put the world on top of themselves—like Atlas. I say this, because my beginning proficiency with this asana has made me feel as if I have joined some sort of club, and that as a result, I owe the universe a little more responsibility—a better diet, less consumption, more social activism. At the very least, in these moments of *Salamba Sirsasana*, I feel more serious—a feeling that can and sometimes does, last, even after I hear the patter of little feet, and a demonic giggling—my personal clue that it's time to come down and be silly.

# 2005 Fall Retreat

by Linzee McCray

Initially, signing up for a yoga retreat seemed sensible. I thought it might push me to be more diligent in my yoga practice, to move it beyond a dog a day. It sounded easy when it was still weeks away.

But, as the retreat came closer, I worried. I confessed to my friend Jan, who has taken yoga with Nancy for six years, that I was scared, that I didn't know whether I'd be able to keep up (I've been in Nancy's classes for just under 18 months).

"It's perfectly normal to be worried," Jan said. But you'll be able to handle it." I hoped she was right.

On Friday evening at six, after a long week of work, we met Lee at Friendship Yoga. I was impressed by how many students he knew from previous retreats and that he remembered their names. I had that feeling of being one of the new kids in school, hoping the teacher would like me. Three of my retreat-mates started yoga with Nancy when I did—the others I imagined to be wise and flexible beyond my capabilities. During weekly classes, I like to "hide" in the back of the room, but that night someone had taken my spot. I panicked, realizing I'd be near the front, where people would see me wobble.

But as always with yoga, the focus on performing the asanas required all my attention, and before I knew it, I no longer remembered that there were other students

around me. I wasn't sure that on a Friday night I'd have the energy to engage in two hours of yoga but soon my work-week was forgotten and I left feeling more still, more quiet than I've ever felt. I looked forward to Saturday.

The next two days were intense, and yet at the end of each session, although I was sore and tired, I also felt invigorated. I'm a word person, and I enjoyed Lee's explanations of yoga philosophy, as well as hearing him describe yoga poses in a slightly different way—when Nancy returns from a workshop, I notice she often has

new language to explain an asana, and I find that some explanations resonate more than others. Lee's descriptions offered one more way to understand how to position my body.

And while very serious about yoga, Lee has an impishness about him and his occasional humor eased the situation: on Sunday morning, our facial expressions must have belied our exertions because he reminded us with a smile, "Don't worry, there aren't an endless number of standing poses."

It wasn't all work. A highlight of the weekend was the Saturday night potluck. It turns out that yoga practitioners are fabulous cooks. A delicious assortment of soups, salads, and desserts, and wide-ranging conversation was a perfect way to wind down from Saturday's efforts.

For me, the weekend offered an opportunity to focus. Typically,

yoga is something I fit into myriad other activities at the end of a long day. I'm always grateful when I do (fit it in), but to be able to make it the center of an entire weekend reminded me it can be much more. And while I can't claim to practice every day, I am focusing my efforts on particular asanas that are difficult for me. I'm a little less afraid.

Hi All,

Thought you might like to know that Guruji is doing really well. He looks great. He said that it was a long recovery, but that special golden tone to his skin always says that there's good health under there.

Geetaji and Prasantji, (Guriji's daughter and son) also doing well and teaching beautiful classes. How good are these teachers?

Indescribably good. I can't describe it, but here's a taste: Yesterday near the end of savasana in the Ladies' Class, Geetaji said that you should feel that you don't know the difference between your head and your feet. Which is which, which is where. She told the story of the great devotee, Guru Nanak (I believe) and how when he was lying down others noticed that the bottom of his feet were toward the icon to which he was devoting himself, which is considered a sign of disrespect. They touched him and said, 'Why do you have your feet toward the icon?' He apologized and said that he hadn't realized that was the case. Then when he went to change his position, as he turned, the icon turned with him. It was beautiful, even as Guruji was lying there in that beautiful savasana of his. Hope you are all well.

With love,