

The history of yoga is that it has been passed from teacher to student (guru to sisya) over millennia. Each teacher grapples with and establishes a way of working to resolve the questions posed within the Yoga Sutras by Patanjali. What has to be recognised is that Patanjali does not describe the specifics of what to do in one's daily practice but rather generates a map of the human condition, outlining why we suffer, along with types of suffering, the behaviour of the mind, as well as types of people, and ways to practice to resolve the inner turmoil we all experience. It is up to each individual to form a methodology of practice that applies Patanjali's principles. This is the work that a practitioner does to confirm or refute the propositions of Patanjali's Yoga.

In the Yoga Sutras Patanjali defines 2 sets of Yoga practices that are applied to address the sufferings and still the consciousness:

- Action & dispassion (Abhyasa & vairagya)
- Practice, self study and surrender (called Kriyayoga)

By applying the Yoga practices, we seek to achieve a level of integration to counter the alienation and fragmentation that we experience in our lives. Patanjali does not tell us what to do when we wake up each day.

When working with a teacher the student is exposed to the methodology generated by the teacher based on their own experience. It involves 2 aspects

- A set of practices that the teacher developed to study themselves. This self study is referred to as Svadhyaya. It is knowledge based on their own experience gained through practice.
- A culture of practice. This involves more than learning what to practice but '**how to practice**'. How to practice includes how to respond to obstacles, to injuries, as well as how to uncover one's own tendencies and inclinations.

What a teacher does when working with a student is to induct them into the practice. This involves teaching the techniques required to do the practice which could be likened to learning a musical instrument. A musician begins with instruction on how to hold the instrument, to generate the notes, to perform specific pieces and evolves gradually and sequentially to achieve a level of fluency and intimacy with the object. Externally we see a method to build up from individual notes, to scales, to specific pieces and so on. There is another process being undertaken also. Something which is less visible to the observer, something which cannot be seen from outside. What a teacher brings to the student and his/her process is the acuity of their observation- their practice sensitivity. This is the thing they have developed through their own practice disciplines and is the quality that the student cannot have at the outset regardless of how gifted or how enthusiastic they are to learn.

This can be seen clearly when we look at the lineage of T Krishnamacharya one of the most influential teachers of Yoga last century. T Krishnamacharya was taught in the Himalaya by Yogeshwara Ramamohana Brahmachari. In turn he taught a number of students and notable of these were 3 teachers BKS Iyengar, TKV Desikachar, and Pattabhi Jois. If we look at these 3 what we see is that they bear little resemblance to each other in the specifics of their practice. Apart from involving the practice of asana they each appear quite different. But when each of these 3 teachers had the same teacher why is this the case. From this one teacher each individual refines their own practice understanding and over a lifetime of practice. Through ongoing and uninterrupted practice (Abhyasa) each individual traces themselves to come to a place of understanding through practice. There is no other way.

BKS Iyengar for example did not go on copying his teacher. He used his teachers guidance and followed these pathways of practice until he was able to examine himself. He, in turn, then communicates the examples that he finds from within his practice. Even within the Iyengar tradition his Daughter Geeta and son Prashant have developed their own distinctive voices as teachers.

BKS Iyengar makes the following statement

'The yoga I teach is purely astanga yoga, known as the eight-limbed yoga, expounded by Patanjali in his 196 terse sutra, each of which reflects profound experiential knowledge. These are supplemented with hatha yoga texts, the Bhagavad Gita and others. Patanjali's Yoga Sutra have attracted considerable attention and there are many commentaries on them. Most commentators have seen the subject of yoga objectively or from an

academic angle. On the other hand, I have responded to it subjectively. Through my uninterrupted practice and its refinement I have compared my experiences and feelings with the original text¹

Iyengar accepts and applies Patanjali's Yoga practices within the practice of Asana and Pranayama. Asana and Pranayama are 2 of the 8 disciplines but each have specific daily routines. Iyengar asserts that Patanjali's Astanga Yoga need not be a sequential set of 8 steps each practiced individually but can be applied concurrently. In the passage below he states

'In each posture, in each action, you should be able to find yoga in its integrity according to Patanjali's explanations Patanjali has not said: 'Eight steps;' all these put together are Yoga. But unfortunately people who have not practised at all say: 'This is physical'. Yama and Niyama: when you are doing the posture, the ethics of the right foot, the ethics of the left foot, are they even or not? If you let loose, that is untruth. If the palms are not joining (Parsvottanasana), that is Himsa (violence): you are showing violence on that palm which is not working at all. Because your intelligence has not touched there, so the truth is unknown. [...] So please learn that these poses have been given to know whether in any posture whatever we do, whether you can follow the eight steps or not. [...] All the postures contain all the eight steps.'

This focus on a practice in which each asana contains all the 8 steps holds a recognition that asanas be practiced with deliberate intention and ethics, details in performance and will generate specific outcomes in the body and mind. That the asanas deliver an experience of integration. This integrated practice of asana is referred to as Yogasana. The methodology of how to practice is more significant than the specifics of the techniques. It provides an entry point for the student. It's a way to enter the world of practice, to orientate themselves in that world and to move about in that landscape within themselves. It is not an outcome!

Traditionally Yoga, music, art were all taught under the Guru-Sisya system. It is a system based on Svadhyaya (self study) and the role that the teacher plays is to uncover the individual nature of the student knowing that each student will exhibit habits and aspects of their character that may hinder their progress. The teacher's role will involve instructing the student but their vital function is to bring to the student's attention to those elements that they may not be able to see. In essence, a teacher may instruct but they do far more as the student-teacher relationship evolves.

The word Parampara denotes the transmission from teacher to student down a line. It is lineage. Parampara involves a relationship conducted over time in which the teacher observes the student and teaches the individual. The student learns about themselves through the practice. Parampara is effectively an apprenticeship formed in a craft which evolves into skilfulness by working with the instrument. Whilst studying at the Iyengar Institute in Pune, India recently I attended a concert by Zakir Hussain the internationally renowned tabla player. Zakir is a classical tabla player performing time-honoured pieces of music from across the centuries called Ragas. I purchased tickets late and was able to buy low-priced tickets at the back of the auditorium. We queued and entered the crowded space and found seats. What unfolded was mesmerising as the audience who were intimately acquainted with each Raga were able to discern moments of supreme subtlety and nuance in a way that my untrained ear could never hope to achieve. The audience were completely absorbed and expressed joy based on their capacity to look into what unfolded throughout the performance. Zakir Hussain was expressing something he had learned through his teacher but had made his own through practice and here he was communicating this knowledge from his own experience to an audience who were appreciating his own individual interpretation.

There is an ongoing evolution when teaching through lineage where the specifics of practice will vary between teachers as each teacher conveys to the student their own experience, examples of their knowledge gained through experience. This first-hand account of the practice transfers from generation to generation so that the practice is always relevant. Additionally, it is vested in the trust between the teacher and student. This trust is

¹ Iyengar BKS, Astadala Yogamala Volume 2. Yoga Drsti

established over time and becomes the basis in which a teacher is able to communicate the subtle understanding of their art and the student becomes able to comprehend what is being transferred.

Based on the ongoing relationship the teacher comes to know the student beyond the social self that is presented to the world. Seeing through their choices and behaviours a visible expression of the underlying thoughts and values. This non social exchange which is neither forged in a contract of social behaviour or expectation is at the core of the learning potential and has little to do with instructing asanas. What the teacher offers and the student needs is to have an experienced eye who knows them well to guide, to verify or to challenge and redirect their efforts over time in a way that an instructor can never do.

Today however, yoga is often taught in a class environment. It has become an exercise modality that bears little resemblance to its true purpose, its history, and its profound subject matter. We attend classes that are often devoid of Svadhyaya (self-study) or any methodology that will produce a meaningful engagement or outcome. True learning is not the acquisition of points of detail, nor is it the ability to perform complex asanas. A practice that takes us beyond our social selves with the potential to change how we behave and who we ultimately become involves more than bland statements and encouraging words.

Let us not lose the potency gained through committed practice within an enduring student-teacher relationship which ultimately provides a respectful and meaningful exchange and maintains Parampara. Without this the heart of Yoga is lost....

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