

Dear Fellow IYNAUS Members:

Last week, California Radio Station KQED published an article addressing sexual abuse of yoga students by yoga teachers. While the article also discusses other styles of yoga, it includes some unfortunate allegations about IYNAUS and the Iyengar Yoga community in the U.S. In particular, the article suggests that we have tolerated sexual abuse of students by our teachers for over 30 years. Any such suggestion is false, and I write to provide accurate and more complete information about these issues.

At the same time, we commend KQED for shining greater light on these important issues. Yoga teachers occupy positions of trust and power, and yoga students are vulnerable. Any form of sexual harassment or abuse of a yoga student by a teacher is abhorrent. For students of yoga to suffer harm, trauma and injury as a result of their teachers' actions is unacceptable and tragic. Sexual harassment and abuse have always violated the ethical rules that govern Certified Iyengar Yoga Teachers. Indeed, one of the central functions of IYNAUS's ethics committee is to respond to complaints of sexual abuse by our teachers. In the past, such complaints have resulted in sanctions against CIYTs at several levels of certification, including Advanced levels.

In this regard, one of the major reasons that IYNAUS was established in 1992 was to adjudicate claims of sexual abuse and formulate appropriate remedies. From its inception, women have been central to IYNAUS. Women have consistently represented the vast majority of IYNAUS's board members, of its committee members, and of each level of our CIYTs. Women also constitute the majority of our students.

Long before the KQED article was published, the #MeToo movement led to increased discussion of these issues in the Iyengar Yoga community— and also in the greater yoga community in U.S. Members of our community have been exploring whether enhanced education and other new practices may reduce the risks of harm without eliminating the benefits of physical adjustments in our system.

While we commend KQED for giving further prominence to these issues, some of the article's assertions about IYNAUS and Iyengar Yoga are incorrect and ignore important historical facts.

First, the article makes extensive allegations about the conduct of senior teacher Manousos Manos in the late 1980s and suggests that the Iyengar Yoga community did not then take any action to respond to those allegations. This is incorrect.

There were then two sets of allegations against Manousos Manos. The first was that he had sexual relationships with female students outside of class. The second was that he inappropriately touched students in class. These allegations were made before the establishment of IYNAUS, but a committee was formed to investigate the allegations. Manousos Manos admitted to sexual relationships with his students, but denied the allegations of inappropriate and non-consensual touching in his classes and workshops.

The committee presented the evidence and its conclusions to Gururji, and many teachers communicated with Gururji about the appropriate response. Gururji decided to give Manousos Manos a second chance. He did not expel him from the system. But he stated that Manousos Manos would not get another chance if he engaged in sexually abusive conduct in the future. Other remedial measures were also adopted. Mr. Manos publicly confessed his misconduct and apologized to his students, fellow teachers, and to his wife at the 1990 U.S. Iyengar Yoga convention. Restrictions were imposed on his teaching for a period of time. He voluntarily underwent psychotherapy.

The suggestion that the conduct was swept under the rug and ignored is thus false. The issue was debated, addressed, and resolved at the highest levels of our system, and Gururji made a decision that he believed would prevent future sexual abuses by Manousos Manos — with a remedy of expulsion if it did not. The decision was communicated throughout the system.

Contrary to statements in the article, IYNAUS had nothing to do with the events or decisions in the late 1980s and 1990. IYNAUS did not exist until January 1, 1992, and the events from the late 1980s were among the factors that led to the formation of IYNAUS. In partial response to these occurrences, Gururji urged the establishment of a U.S. association that would assess and certify teachers, adopt ethical rules to govern them, and assure compliance with those rules. One of IYNAUS's first acts was to establish an Ethics Committee charged with enforcing our ethical rules.

Second, it manifestly is not the case that IYNAUS has permitted sexual abuses by teachers in the time since IYNAUS was formed. IYNAUS's ethical rules are based on the *yamas* and *niyamas*. They prohibit any form of sexual harassment or abuse of students by CIYTs. They also prohibit intimate relationships between CIYTs and their students.

IYNAUS long ago adopted procedures designed to assure the effective enforcement of these rules. Under them, complaints are filed with the IYNAUS Ethics Committee, which is charged with investigating any allegations that any CIYT has violated these rules and with developing appropriate sanctions and remedies when violations are found. Our ethics committee observes basic due process. It hears from both sides and makes decisions based on evidence.

The proceedings of our ethics committee are confidential, for the protection of both students and teachers. Confidentiality protects the privacy of the students who claim that they were sexually abused. It also protects students in other ways. There are statements in the KQED article to the effect that students do not want to publicly accuse prominent teachers and risk the ire of members of the broader yoga community. The confidentiality of the IYNAUS ethics proceedings eliminates or significantly obviates any such concerns. Confidentiality also protects teachers. For example, not all complaints are well founded, and confidentiality protects a teacher when complaints that lack merit are filed.

Since IYNAUS was formed, our ethics committee has heard a number of complaints alleging sexual misconduct by CIYTs in the US. Sexual abuses have been found, and sanctions imposed, on CIYTs with Advanced certificates as well as with lower levels of certification. Under our Bylaws, the sanctions are recommended by the ethics committee and imposed by the IYNAUS Executive Council (with reports to RIMYI) in the case of lower level teachers, and the IYNAUS Executive Council recommends sanctions to RIMYI in the case of teachers with Advanced Certificates.

Third, in the 26-year period between IYNAUS's formation on January 1, 1992 and January 1, 2018, there was not a single ethics complaint that alleged improper touching of students by Manousos Manos or that alleged that he had sexual relations with students.

Fourth, as the Article states, in early 2018, a student and CIYT (Ann West) filed a complaint with the IYNAUS Ethics Committee alleging that Manousos Manos inappropriately looked at and touched her during a class in San Diego in 2013. Ms. West provided this complaint to KQED, which also obtained Mr. Manos's response. The Ethics Committee has been investigating this complaint, and it would be inappropriate to say anything further about the complaint while it is pending.

Fifth, as the Article states, in early 2018, another student (Eka Ekong) filed an IYNAUS ethics complaint alleging sexually inappropriate adjustments by another CIYT. Eka Ekong also provided her complaint to KQED, and the KQED article quotes her and the accused CIYT. This complaint, too, is currently being addressed by the IYNAUS Ethics Committee, and it would be improper to say anything further about it now.

Finally, discussions are occurring within the IYNAUS committees and the broader IYNAUS community about these issues. Physical adjustments are important features of our method. Appropriate adjustments can be profoundly beneficial. But when these adjustments are attempted, there often is inherently some risk of inadvertent touching of sensitive areas, particularly when students are in dynamic poses. In addition, students who have trauma in their distant or recent past or other special sensitivities can be injured psychologically, emotionally, or physically by adjustments that would be beneficial for others. How best to accommodate the different interests is a matter that requires careful thought and consideration, and the IYNAUS Board will be considering whether there should be clarifications or modifications to our guidelines, practices, and procedures. We will also address any concerns about our complaint procedures.

We welcome all your input as we move forward. If you have ideas or concerns, please do not be silent. Convey them to your regional representative or to any other member of the

IYNAUS board. Emails can always be sent to me at president@iynaus.org, and I will share them with my board colleagues. Emails can also be sent to any other board member. The contact information for each member of the IYNAUS Board of Directors is listed on the first page of each issue of *Yoga Samachar*.

But please respect the fact that the proceedings of our Ethics Committee are governed by principles of due process. Please do not communicate with our ethics chair or the members of her committee about any pending complaint to which you are not a party.

Yours in yoga,
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