

Geetaji on Practice - part 2

Geetaji gave a lecture on practice at RIMYI's Monthly Meet in November 1997.

The lecture was audiotaped, transcribed, and edited by Lois Steinberg.

It was originally published in the magazine of the 2001 IYNAUS Convention, "Sadhana."

This is part 2 of 4 of that lecture. The final two parts will be included in member benefit emails in the coming months.

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In your practice you have to have a balance between the passive and the active asanas. To have a dynamic feeling in the asanas you activate yourself in different ways. For example, beginners are dull in the sense that they are not sure what they are supposed to do. The expanse of their awareness is up to their limits. When they are learning in a class, they are asked to concentrate on the limbs of the body—the arms and legs. They have to feel different stretches, the extensions of the limbs. The teacher says, "Put your left foot in this manner, let your arch of the foot be like this. Let the elbows be like that; let your arms be straight. Let your spine extend. Watch your chest. Watch your spine." They get the direct instructions from the teachers. However, nobody is there to tell them these things when they are practicing on their own.

Sometimes the students ask whether they can audiotape the class so that they can listen to it and practice. I say no, because the tape will be running forward and you won't be catching anything because you have to link your actions with the speed of the tape. Instead of your mind getting involved in the very doing of asana, it will be listening, which is incorrect. In fact, you have to work yourself. You have to synchronize the dynamic movement of the mind with the action of the body. The tape-recorded instructions will not help in this sense. You have to record your feelings, the sensitivity in your mind.

Suppose a beginner wants to practice. They know all the standing asanas such as *Utthita Trikonasana*, *Utthita Parsvakonasana*, *Virabhadrasana I*, *Virabhadrasana II*, *Ardha Chandrasana*, *Virabhadrasana III*, *Parivritta Trikonasana*, *Parivritta Parsvakonasana*, *Parsvottanasana*, and *Prasarita Padottanasana*. Now, these standing asanas, if they are done dynamically—everything on the right side and then everything on the left side, at a stretch—the mind gets ignited. Instead of attention to the correct posture, you just attempt the asanas. It's like when we were taught spelling in school. We said, "B-o-o-k, book, r-o-o-m, room." We only did the spelling. In a similar manner here, we spell *Trikonasana* to *Parsvottanasana*. We have to do them like spelling work. You do one after the other. Similarly, you do on the left side one after the other and the mind is ignited. The intelligence gets charged. The mind catches it and says, "I did it!" Now, you begin to work. Your mind gets stimulated to find out where you went wrong, where you did correctly, what things were missing, and what you are supposed to add. The physical actions begin to get mentally linked. You begin to link the body to the mind, the mind to the intelligence, the intelligence to the consciousness, the consciousness to the soul.

In the class when we teach, for example, *Utthita Trikonasana*, we see whether your right leg is turned out properly. We invite your attention everywhere. We ask, "Did you turn your knee? Did you turn your ankle? Did you lift the arch of your foot? Did you turn the root of the thigh? While turning the right leg out did you stretch your left leg?" These are the ways of attempting the asanas that you learn in class. When you charge yourself you begin to understand these things. You begin to analyze your actions. Your mind begins to see whether you are doing it correctly. The application of the mind begins there. You become introverted. The outgoing awareness begins to spread inward and the inner journey begins. That's how the beginning of the practice has to be done whether you do the standing poses, *Adho Mukha Vrksasana*, *Pincha Mayurasana*, *Adho Mukha Svanasana*, *Uttanasana*, or any supine asanas.

Suppose you are in your first asana, *Supta Virasana*. You may be there for two minutes. Then after the third or fourth minute, a time comes when you begin to feel uneasy inside. You notice that your chest is not open or your spine is not extended. You have a dull feeling. Then you say, "I need my chest to lift a little more. I need a support for my back to ascend upward more." Sometimes, unknowingly you stretch your hands over the head. What are all these things? Is it not igniting the mind at that time? The mind sends the message. It wants the body to make space within. The mind wants to spread itself within.

The Yoga Sutra says that you have to be absolutely steady in the asana. Steadiness, *Sthirata*, doesn't mean that you have to be there like a stone. Then you will absolutely be a stone in your body, your mind, your intelligence. The asana is not going to convert you at all. It cannot bring any transformation. But when the mind tells you to do something, please attend to it, listen to it. It says something. It speaks to you. You say, "I'm doing the asana but I've got some pain." That pain is telling you something-that you are wrong. Somewhere you are sinking. The pain is the outer or external speech. You have to find the hidden meaning.

In the medical class, we adjust the students, in the beginning, for example, in *Supta Virasana*. They are there for two minutes as we are going around to see the other students. During the third minute, when we come to them again, we find their body sinking or tilting somewhere. It takes three to four minutes for that body to go again to its dull state. That's why the body is a treacherous friend. The first minute it shows its sharpness. Watch yourself, even if you're not a student in a medical class. In your *Sirsasana*, the first, second, or third minute you are fine. Later, at the fourth or fifth minute, you begin to sink. You need something to uplift yourself. Maybe you need to lift the shoulders. Maybe your legs are sinking inside, or your knees are bending, tilting, and you need to correct them. That means you're going through the learning process. The stability at the first stage is not really the stability.

When the students in the medical class are adjusted after the third or fourth minute, often they are confused. They say, "Geeta came and she added another bolster and a slanting plank. She opened the chest and she went away. The next moment Guruji comes and says that the slanting plank is useless and puts a brick over there. He adjusted the brick and now I am feeling nice." Are we being whimsical to just go on adding bolsters and bricks? No. Your body is showing certain changes. It is in fact improving. The chest, which was

not opening last week, started opening a little more this week. When it's opening it needs a strong support. Otherwise, after the third or fourth minute it will sink again and that is wrong. It means that the fire is extinguishing. If the chest is further lifted, the fire begins to burn. It means the area is aerated. The mind, the body, the intelligence become alert.

While practicing, you need to apply your mind. The teacher says to do *Dwipada Viparita Dandasana* for five minutes. You stay in that position. In those five minutes, watch: What are the variations that occurred? How many times the chest sinks, the straightened legs drop, the knees lose their grip and bend, the rolled-in thighs roll out? The spine shows its intelligence to bend more than earlier. After that, the spine becomes more alert and it gets a better curvature. You have to check these things in your pose. You have to watch how your body and mind begin to show the inner change.

As you practice, within five minutes you will see changes and you have to adjust and change your position in that asana. That is called correction. Correction for what? You write, "B-o-o-k." Okay, "book," it's correct. Some teacher has to check it and say it is right. When it comes to asana we can't have a tick mark, saying it is correct. If I say do *Dwipada Viparita Dandasana* and you have done it, I will say you did the right asana. If you did *Vrksasana* instead of *Dwipada Viparita Dandasana*, then it is incorrect. But in the same asana the correct asana will be felt when the energy is properly distributed, when the asana is structurally correct, the muscles are evenly distributed and you, along with your mind, are well settled.

When your body shows the changes in the asana, you have to see whether it shows improvement or merely the vigorousness. We have to get you to understand that. You find that as you perform the asana in the manner I said, you begin to get your inner feelings. You witness the chest opening. You feel the length of your body in *Sirsasana*. If it is not experienced again you are wrong somewhere. You have to apply your intelligence. In class your teacher may say, "Shoulders up." Did you lift your shoulders? Your teacher may say, "Extend the inner edges of the legs." Did you do that? Your teacher says, "Your thighs are rotating out." Did you turn them inside? In fact, these are the questions pertaining to outside the body. If you question from inside you will know that you really begin to feel your body from inside. The connections begin there, inside. Whether you do passive or active asanas, your mind has to get ignited in that manner.

(to be continued...)