



SAMACHAR

THE VOICES OF OUR IYNAUS COMMUNITY

February 2021

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Our Time on Zoom

By Heather Haxo-Phillips

I love teaching on Zoom. I really do. That might surprise you—it surprises even me! Teaching online has been a wonderful experience, and I hope to have it as one of my teaching mediums for the rest of my life.

The day we started on Zoom, I felt like a blast of fresh air had hit me. I gulped it with such excitement. It was the prana of possibility, of opportunity! I had long felt constricted by our small one-room studio. Our faculty had so much more to offer. So, we immediately started many new programs we had been dreaming of: pranayama classes three days a week, social justice workshops and a study group, a meditation class, yoga for healing classes, chanting classes, a private lesson program, and an expanded healthy aging program. Over the last nine months we have experimented with a variety of formats, including public classes, workshops, short immersions, long study programs, and an extensive studentship and teacher education program. Each format has unique opportunities for the students to access and strengthen their practice.

Zoom is HOME

Students have a completely new relationship with their own homes—their body as home, and the physical space around them they call home. Over the last nine months I have seen students transform in so many ways. They have upgraded their spaces, cleaning and decluttering for a more welcome abode. Many have even moved to new homes so they could have a dedicated room for practice! This has had a tremendously positive impact on their quality of life. It is as if decluttering their spaces has helped

students declutter their minds and their approach to life. And, I love how practice at home includes all the little creatures, whether they be human babies or literal cuddle bunnies. It is so much fun to celebrate the small things that have a big impact on a student's personal life at home—greeting new kittens, christening a new prop, welcoming the first hearth fire of the season.

Zoom is ACCESSIBLE

Students have taken me, and their yoga, with them wherever they go—on a boat, in a campground, or to the grandparent's house for the holidays. I love it. Students who may not feel comfortable in a regular studio do show up to a Zoom class. They have agency over their own experience, to keep the camera on or off, to ask questions or not. This is so important.

Zoom is INTIMATE

For those who want to take advantage of it, students share much more about themselves in a private “chat” than they ever would tell me in person. This has given me a deeper opportunity to be of service, to rise to the occasion for them and for myself. This sense of intimacy has shown them just how much yoga can truly support them through tough times. Students are amazed to hear of the different approaches we have for the physical ailments and emotional challenges all of us go through as human beings. Yes, yoga can help your jaw pain. It can help you get pregnant. It can help you grieve the loss of a child or a spouse, or both. And when you do these practices, you feel so much better, you find the courage and the hope inside to continue on. This gift of asana and pranayama B.K.S. Iyengar gave to all of us—we always had it, but Zoom has helped us access it in wider and deeper ways.

Zoom is SPACE

Each student in their own space allows me to teach many things I could not do in-studio. I now have as much wall space as I want at any time. And I have been using it! Remember those floor standing poses that Guruji first developed in 1938? Well, now we are all practicing them! I am so appreciative that Zoom has given us more time for actually doing asana. We don't have to spend time figuring out the prop situation or negotiating space at the rope wall. This has led to tremendous creativity for me as a teacher and an incredible sense of freedom for the students.

Zoom is CONNECTION

Zoom has been a huge boon in both expanding our community and keeping it together. Our Adeline Yoga community is so close knit, and yet over the years people have had to move away. We have missed these students terribly, hoping to hear their bad puns and great questions again. Now many of us are back together. In any given class we may span 12 time zones, but the jokes remain the same.

At the same time, our love for the practice is now accessible to so many more people. I also appreciate how zoom has allowed us to support students in places in the world where Iyengar Yoga just is not available. Adeline Yoga has a lot of new students from

rural communities in America and places around the world, such as the Middle East and North Africa.

Zoom is EXPERIMENTATION

Obviously, teaching online is not for everyone. You cannot walk around the person. You cannot hand them just the right prop or give an illuminating adjustment. It definitely takes experimentation with Zoom to make the use of all of its capabilities. However, there is so much you can do with Zoom chats, breakout rooms, viewing angles, spotlighting, pinning, and recordings. The capabilities are there for you when, and if, you want to investigate them.

Our students were excited and supportive of our experimentation. It has been a lot of fun, and deeply gratifying for the teachers and the students. We are no longer constrained by time and place. We are now unlimited in possibility—just like the practice itself. We really have Guruji to thank for helping us to feel the joy of spaciousness in our body and to inspire us to strive toward a similar expansive, open-minded approach in our teaching.

I am eager to see my students in person again—to hear their chanting, to share their birthday cake and hand them a strap. And, at the same time, I am deeply grateful for all that Zoom has given us and will give in the years to come.

Finding Balance with Hybrid Classes

by Lisa Waas

Like many of my colleagues, after closing my studio on March 15, my classes were strictly online March 16–June 1, 2020. Once Florida moved to phase two of reopening—and because my studio is located on an island with only 30,000 residents and very few COVID cases—I made the decision to offer “hybrid” classes, a combination of in-person and online options for each class.

This decision was not taken lightly, of course. The phase two rollout was planned over four weeks before implementation. Some students did not want to attend online classes, and I wanted to give them a safe way to continue practice.

Our first step was hiring a professional cleaner to deep clean the entire studio before setting it up for socially-distanced practice. Then we marked mat spaces with vinyl numbered floor stickers—12 feet between mats side-to-side and six feet front-to-back, as well as accounting for teacher space. Each mat space on the floor also has a corresponding wall space for student use. We reduced in-person class capacity to nine students within my 1600 square foot studio. Online, I created separate sign-up options for students, decided on a minor price increase for those attending in person to cover added costs, and no drop-ins were allowed.

The hybrid experience took a little getting used to for all involved. In the beginning, we had very few people attend in person and it took about four days for me to become adept at balancing the observation between in-person and online students. However, the set up I have now allows for a more “group experience” for all. The students online fully participate, unmuted, on our 65" TV, and I repeat questions asked by in-person students so those online can hear.

Most classes continue to have small in-person attendance, with only 2–4 students who can remain well spaced and non-masked for practice. For classes with any more than four students in-person, everyone wears a mask during class. And, for classes that fill to the nine person capacity, students stay in one mat space the entire class. Masks are always worn “off the mat.” For the smaller classes, I still include chanting, but for larger classes, this is omitted. Doors and windows remain open since we are in Florida, of course!

We have all found the hybrid class model to be working well and running smoothly. The students who attend in person are thrilled! Some say the studio is the only place they have been since lockdown, and meeting in person keeps our community close and supportive. Beginning students benefit more from being in person, and those who need ropes and props are accommodated.

I believe this hybrid class model is the future. Even after the virus is under control, Zoom has proven to give so much to our community as teachers and students. The four classes a week I take with my teachers are precious, and I can’t imagine them going away. But, as a teacher, I also anticipate most students will return in person when the time is right. I will be happy to have them back in the studio. I wanted to test this model for others and I have been very pleased. We continue to monitor the situation and are prepared to close again if necessary, but the hybrid model brings a great balance to teaching and practice during a pandemic.

Some of the modifications we instituted were:

- Hand sanitizer and disinfecting wipe stations at front door and in studio
- Replacing metal drinking cups with disposable paper cups
- Disposable glove and mask stations
- Increased signage at front door, in bathroom, front desk and in studio
 - Students must wash hands and be masked upon entering
- Stack of white cotton king-size pillowcases to cover bolsters, washed after each use
- Sterilizing station with bottles of Metricide (28-day activated virucide solution) and cloths to clean props (encouraged students to bring own blankets and straps)

- New webcam and iPhone (for a front and side view or to show an in-studio student), wireless microphone, and computer stand next to the teacher.
- Wired connection from the computer to the TV and LAN cable from the computer to the router for signal stability

Beyond Brick and Mortar

by Jen Kagan

When COVID hit, it forced me to do what I've been wanting to do for years—teach online.

Sometimes you have to be forced to take the plunge.

I have been working towards going online for many years, and even made some attempts, but the combination of not having certain skills and my resistance to think outside the “box” of my own studio space have been barriers. COVID forced me to knock down those last barriers, including closing my physical studio space.

Things have changed. But, things have needed to change for years. The model of a fully equipped studio where teachers are paid per student with no security is a model that needs to evolve. This is especially true for studio spaces not situated in large urban centers. There is a great opportunity to look beyond the walls of a brick and mortar studio, to evolve and expand our reach. What better time than now?

COVID forced me to find ways to share and study what I am so passionate about by going online. Living in a small town and dealing with mostly tourists and an unstable population made it impossible for me to expand. An online platform gave me a way to potentially reach more people in alignment with my vision than I ever thought I could.

Being online has taught us ALL to evolve into a different and hopefully broader view of what teaching means. Online teaching has been happening for years even if it might feel new to us. Some of us may have strong feelings about online teaching and learning and its efficacy. However, it is possible. The Iyengars themselves have shown this to be true. Who thought we would have more than three opportunities in one year to study with the Iyengars without the expense of travel? How many more people have experienced their teaching in this year than in all the years of the past. Being online levels the field of yoga for so many!

Of course it takes work. To make the full transition from in-studio to online, I hired a business consultant. I learned the skills I needed to build a larger student base and created and marketed an online course. The online course format is a way to evolve into something that feels more financially stable and effective for building the relationships required for teaching and learning yoga long distance. Connecting to and discovering new students online has been liberating.

This transition was, and still is, uncomfortable. Pushing my boundaries to learn new skills for teaching and running a business online has been very challenging. But the benefits to online teaching are many, and I don't think this platform is going away. I am dedicated to making it work and to joining forces with others who feel the same.

Some important questions we can ask ourselves to adapt to this format are:

- What levels do we teach and how can we best teach to different levels?
- How do we prepare yoga students for this specific learning environment?
- What are our responsibilities as a yoga teacher?
- What are we able or unable to do in this changing environment?
- What can students benefit from now that they couldn't before?
- Are we willing to become skilled in areas that feel uncomfortable like marketing and PR?

In the end, being online means that Iyengar Yoga can reach more people. The brilliance of B.K.S. Iyengar's method, and the expertise of teachers in our community, deserve and need to be seen. It is worth evolving out of our old structures and looking beyond our literal and figurative boxes to share this method with more people.

Post-Pandemic *Parampara*

by Joanna Filipek

As experienced Iyengar Yoga teachers, we cherish direct, undisturbed contact with the student and know the value of manual corrections. We are not fond of the idea of looking at the students in small boxes on the TV or on a laptop screen, so the idea of online teaching was hard to resonate with.

But then COVID happened and most of us have ended up online for much longer than we might have been comfortable with.

After months of remote classes, I haven't tired of online teaching. As a matter of fact, I have found it to bring new, exciting opportunities. But, as many of us have found, the administrative effort around Zoom can be daunting. Incorrect links, missed emails, the hassle of changing a teacher or rescheduling a remote class—all of this chaos is added stress.



A search for affordable software not overloaded with unnecessary features left me unsatisfied, and I ended up asking my software developer friends to help me design something usable. This endeavor became the *iyoga* software application—free of expensive commercial software, free from links to Zoom and all the added chaos.

iyoga has given me my time back to focus on what I actually love, yoga.

Individual teachers and studios alike can use *iyoga*. It is an all-in-one app designed to streamline and combine both Zoom and studio management software:

- teachers schedule classes
- students purchase passes and book classes
- the best part is the virtual classes take place in the very same app
- one-click of a button for students and teachers to begin live streaming
- streaming-buttons only visible to students who have booked the class

We want to develop the app further, so we want to hear from YOU, our community, for your most desired functions.

- What is needed to make the life of a studio manager easier?
- How can we help to maintain the community around the studio AND attract new students?

Can we develop an app that works for OUR online studios?? (See Jen Kagan's article)

Recently Mindbody conducted a survey to learn about the post-pandemic projections of their customers' behaviors. Necessity prompted many people to try streaming fitness services for the first time, but we also have to look ahead. Approximately 46% of surveyed customers plan to combine both in-person and at-home workouts when the pandemic is over. Also, almost 60% of consumers surveyed by TD Ameritrade have no plans to renew their gym memberships once the threat of COVID-19 has passed.

Yoga teachers and students are facing an important decision—a decision about the shape yoga education takes in the post-pandemic time. The survey results indicate there is a big group of people who cannot wait to return to in-studio classes, but there is an equally big group of those who have learned a new way to embrace their teaching and practice. (see Heather Haxo-Phillips article)

Similarly, we teachers have our different preferences. Some will get rid of the online teaching and go back to the beloved studio space as soon as possible. There will be the others ready to continue the online adventure and fulfill the needs of students who desire it.

For me, I am excited to continue to improve the way remote teaching is done and will look for new ideas and ways to share yoga with home practitioners.

I love and respect the Iyengar Yoga tradition and this makes me think how to continue the *Parampara*, the line of teaching, in the new post-pandemic reality. I'm excited about the novelty of the changed environment. There is so much to explore, to discover, and to create.

Inverted

By Chloe Wieland

Amused, I watch the video of my niece learning to stand one more time. From *Bharmanasana*, she lifts herself up from the kitchen floor, then falls back onto her behind. She makes a frustrated sound, something between a cry and a giggle, as her mother cheers her on. Her struggle reminds me of my own feelings of joy and frustration in learning *Salamba Sirsasana*. It is exciting to see the world from a new vantage point, but balance and coordination is difficult! Like my niece, I have depended on props and teachers to stay up.

My journey with *Sirsasana* began three years ago, when I began regularly practicing Iyengar Yoga. I was drawn to the thrill of being upside down, and quickly learned to balance at the wall. I had nearly forgotten the wall was a prop when a teacher observed that I had the strength to move away from the wall, but something was holding me back. "Maybe fear," she'd said casually.

This comment was on my mind in March, at what would be my last in-person yoga class of 2020. I requested a refresher on *Sirsasana*, hoping maybe a trick would pull everything together. Instead, we reviewed the fundamentals, the importance of a strong base and foundation. We did not invert.

But the world did. When COVID shut down San Francisco, I decided to initiate a daily practice of inversions to help manage my time at home—my version of making sourdough. Some days I bravely moved the mat a few inches away from the wall, but I wasn't ready for the center of the room.

I had just begun to find solace in this new routine when our lives shifted again, and a visit to a rustic family cabin turned into a long-term stay. The cabin provided everything

we needed, including isolation and internet access. It was small, yet felt spacious. And it was beautiful—large windows placed us in the center of the redwood understory, face to face with tan oaks and bay laurels, chipmunks and jays.

Despite the environment, I still panicked. What about my routine? The move had disrupted my daily *Sirsasana* practice. On top of that, the cabin was not compatible with setting up Zoom space. It was a challenge to find level ground, and there were few walls. And, practicing in the woods was different. Living in nature encouraged “being” over “doing.” Instead of working towards a particular goal, I relaxed into an extended restorative practice. I stopped taking classes, but I never stopped doing yoga.

Spring turned to summer. Refreshed and ready, we returned to the city—back to the solid walls and even floors that seemed so essential months earlier. But also, back to the reality of the pandemic and the fight for Black Lives Matter that raged on.

August also brought wildfires—more fear, more nausea, and more restrictions. I flipped through *Light on Yoga* for advice on cleansing my lungs, and was reminded of my *Sirsasana*. Guruji writes, “It takes time for the beginner to become oriented to his surroundings while he is balancing on his head...This is due to fear of a fall...To topple over while learning the head stand is not as terrible as we imagine.”

Inspired, I set mat up in the middle of the room. *Thump*. My feet sailed over my head and I laid on my back, hoping my partner wouldn’t worry. Second try, more gently, I rolled into a somersault. I smile—it’s not so bad.

The following day, I recalled the space and peace and confidence cultivated during my time in the woods. Patiently, I activated my spine with *Chaturanga Dandasana*, firm like the trunk of a redwood. Next, I moved into preparation for head balance, asking my shoulders to lift up and into my back. I carefully placed my head into the weave of my fingers on the mat, delicate but firm, like a nest holding the eggs of a sparrow. Pressing wrists, forearms and elbows I lift my hips and walk in. Unfolding my legs as gracefully as a newborn fawn, I find myself vertical, feet up, surrounded by air.

The parts I had been nurturing came alive—shoulders wide, chest open, and every part of my body contributing to being upright. Most importantly, my mind was attentive. Each wobble, each shift of weight and movement of my body was matched by an action at my base.

Fear was there, but so was the thrill of holding myself up. For the child learning to stand, falling is not a failure. Each try drives them to the literal next step. To find my *Sirsasana*, the same patience and practice was needed, but I also needed to have faith in the fall. My time in the cabin, away from formal teaching and the stresses of life, gave me time and space to listen to myself. I learned, as I’m sure my niece is learning, that by facing our fears, we learn to trust ourselves.