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with Vairagya Eiger

You will learn and be supported to find alignment in the pose, and will be assisted with props to help achieve the postures.

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SPIRIT, MIND & BODY

Have You Heard of Iyengar Yoga?

by Vairagya Eiger

I am an Iyengar yoga teacher here in Petaluma and am often asked the question, "What is Iyengar yoga?" Here is where the fun begins, as I get to share this invigorating, therapeutic, and rewarding style of practicing yoga.

The founder of this style of yoga, BKS Iyengar, has been a student and practitioner of yoga for over eighty years. He has been recognized as a pioneer in medical applications of yoga. The most advanced programs are found at the center of Iyengar Yoga, the Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute located in Pune, India. These systems are also found in hospitals and physical therapy clinics worldwide.

Clinical studies have shown Iyengar yoga to have significant impact on common modern day ailments such as depression and osteoarthritis and to have a rehabilitative effect on sports and overuse injuries.

Iyengar yoga focuses on alignment principles with the use of props such as blankets, bolsters, blocks, straps, and even chairs! Props also allow tired or ill students to enjoy the benefits of many yoga poses (called "asanas") while remaining fully supported. This approach requires less muscular

effort. It is a safe, fun style of yoga that covers all of the yoga postures over time. What I find so very satisfying in Iyengar's teachings is that the student can start at any point in time, at any age or experience level. Fit or unconditioned, healthy or frail, there is something for just about everyone in a true Iyengar class.

Iyengar teachers must complete at least two years of rigorous training to be certified and to have permission to call themselves instructors of the Iyengar method. Many teachers continue their education to complete subsequent intermediate and senior levels of certification, potentially requiring a decade or more of study. The emphasis is on the development of strength, stamina, flexibility, and balance, as well as concentration and awareness. Each class has a theme around which the teacher builds a specific sequence of asanas -- such as standing poses, back-bending, inversions, forward bends, twists, seated and reclining postures. Iyengar Yoga is appropriate for any level student and modifications to all postures are offered throughout the class. Students are asked to pay attention to their breath and to listen carefully to what their bodies are telling them.

Why come to an Iyengar class? In classes, students are guided through a series of postures with precise instruction in the execution of the pose and the details of the active points of the posture. The result is a sense of ease and awareness in the body. In some postures, one may experience physical challenges, but with guidance from a well-trained Iyengar teacher you will be able to achieve the pose. The ability to modify and use props will allow you, at your level of ability, to reap the benefits of this practice -- including, but not

limited to increased strength and flexibility (reducing possibility of injury), better balance and coordination, more energy, heightened awareness of your body's unique strengths and weaknesses, reduced stress, and increased internal calm and quiet.

People who go to Iyengar classes say that the use of props helps them to feel more accomplished. For example, one student who has trouble bending forward can achieve a comfortable forward bend easily with the use of blocks beneath his hands. When a student feels successful and confident, he or she is more likely to be consistent in the practice of yoga.

In some yoga classes there is little instruction or help offered by the teacher. In most Iyengar classes, you are taught specifically how to understand the poses and to recognize what is needed to be comfortable in the practice. A regular Iyengar practice will bring positive change not just to posture, strength, and flexibility but also to the mind state of the student. Even students starting at age 55 and over have reaped the benefits of this yoga style.

It is through the body that we experience the soul. We learn patience, humor, how to work in new and different ways, and how to rest completely. The end result is a joyful sense of wholeness, which is the true meaning of the word yoga.

Vairagya Eiger, a lifetime practitioner of yoga, is a graduate of the Iyengar Institute in San Francisco, as well as a Gyrotonic and Pilates Trainer. She lives in Petaluma with her family and teaches in several locations around the Bay Area, including Bodyworks Integrative Yoga and Stress Management Center in Petaluma.

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