

8 January 2012

To *The New York Times*

Re: "How Yoga Can Wreck Your Body" by William Broad

To the Editor:

If yoga hurts, it is not yoga. A student's overreaching ego, a teacher's ignorance –many causes may lead to injury while doing yoga, but yoga itself cannot be blamed. Nor can B. K. S. Iyengar, who more than any figure in modern yoga has made yoga safe, accessible and transformative for all.

Many teachers and students of Iyengar Yoga were disturbed by the negative tone and outright errors in "How Yoga Can Wreck Your Body" by William J. Broad. Just one example: Broad calls Roger Cole a "reformer" who advocates reducing neck bending in Shoulder Stand by lifting the shoulders on a stack of blankets. But this teaching was devised by Mr. Iyengar – Cole is simply one of many of Mr. Iyengar's teachers who work this way. Similarly Broad writes that Mr. Iyengar does not address yoga injuries in his seminal book *Light on Yoga*; any reading will reveal countless instructions on how to perform poses correctly, without harm.

We urge readers to try an Iyengar Yoga class themselves. Iyengar Yoga teachers are held to the most rigorous standards. Only after years of practice and study, and close examination by senior teachers, are they certified. A Certified Iyengar Yoga teacher is a student's guarantee of a yoga experience which is safe, progressive and personalized to their condition.

During his more than 70 years of practice and teaching, B. K. S. Iyengar has pioneered modern yoga and modern yoga therapeutics. One of his guiding principles – that yoga is for everyone – led him to develop modifications for the yoga *asanas* (postures) using props which allow them to be performed by practitioners of every age, fitness and skill level.

Iyengar teachers are trained to work even with students with serious limitations and injuries, to recognize when students are ready for certain asanas, and not to ask them to go beyond their readiness. Going to one's maximum also means not going beyond one's limits; teachers must help students understand this.

Before undertaking the practice of *asana*, those who pursue the eight-limbed path of yoga must first practice the guidelines of *yama* and *niyama*; first among these is *ahimsa* – non-violence. For a teacher, this means "do no harm."

Sincerely,

Christopher Beach, President

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