



Yoga Mandir Newsletter

In this second edition of the newsletter, I am pleased to include a piece on unconditional practice. The origin of the article dates back to a visit I made to study with BKS Iyengar at his Institute in Pune in the late 1980s. One week prior to my arrival, Prashant was involved in a terrible car accident in which he suffered life-threatening injuries. He was in hospital in a coma when I arrived, there had been frantic discussions in Australia about what support we could offer, and as President of the Yoga Association of Australia at that time, I was offering what support we could give.

On my arrival, there was much upheaval and uncertainty, and we visited the hospital, but it was clear that only time would reveal whether Prashant's situation would improve or deteriorate. What unfolded from this point was unexpected and revealing.

I expected that classes at the institute would stop for the month given the seriousness of the situation. But on the first evening of classes, Guruji entered the room. So began a month of classes with extraordinary intensity.

The classes were demanding, and in the often-heavy monsoon rain, we were asked to give our all to each asana and to each class. In one such session, guruji stopped us and said 'my son is in the hospital and may not survive but you come here and you give only the minimum required to survive the class. When your efforts are partial, how will you ever learn?'

I found it shocking to be confronted with this harsh statement. But it was also true. I could see that I measured myself and managed effort in a way that was self-protective and aimed to regulate the demands made upon me. From this day onwards, I changed my approach, making each practice and each class count.

What I discovered through this approach was the basis for the writing that follows.

best wishes
Alan

Alan's commitment to writing continues. Each issue of this newsletter will feature new essays and articles aimed at stimulating thought and encouraging contemplation on the world of Yoga practice and teaching.

We invite all those who wish to stay connected with these writings and to be part of this ongoing conversation to subscribe to the newsletter.

Sign up to the Newsletter



Unconditional practice

If your practice is defined by an idea of what is right, it will ultimately fail—not because it lacks sincerity, but because it is bound to a fixed point of view. Practice, in its most profound sense, is not an effort to conform to correctness, but a journey to discover what is real. When we begin with the assumption that there is a ‘correct’ asana, a proper form, or a perfected method, we enter the domain of conditional practice—a practice shaped by goals, standards, and preconceptions. But whose standard of correctness are we fulfilling? Is it a reflection of something your teacher once said? Is it drawn from a book, an image, or the demonstration of a more advanced practitioner?

Correctness, while useful in guiding beginners and establishing foundational principles, can become a limitation if it solidifies into an ideal that constrains our experience. We must question whether we are measuring ourselves against an external authority or engaging in a genuine enquiry of our own. Learning to practise is not about rehearsing ideals—it is about developing the capacity to sustain enquiry. And enquiry, if it is to be sincere, must remain open-ended.

Conditional practice arises when we impose an outcome onto the process. It aims for results: greater flexibility, better balance, improved breathing, or a state of calm. While these aims are not inherently wrong, they subtly shape the direction of our attention. We begin to value some experiences and dismiss others. We praise effort that leads to visible progress, and we denigrate the quieter moments of difficulty or fatigue. Conditional practice is guided by discrimination of what is deemed desirable, and it functions by exclusion—it resists those elements of experience that do not align with its goals.

The danger in this is that practice becomes a form of affirmation rather than investigation. When we practise only to confirm what we believe, we fail to see what lies beyond those beliefs. Any fixed idea of practice is necessarily timebound. It is shaped by our current understanding, which itself is built from the cumulative residue of past experience. It reflects what we know to date. But the living process of practice reveals itself in change—in insight that disrupts what was previously known, in the emergence of a new capacity, or the surfacing of an unfamiliar sensation. Thus, to remain fixed in an idea is to place a limit on what practice can reveal.

This timebound nature of practice is sharply evident in the case of balancing in an asana such as Adho Mukha Vrksasana—Handstand. One may try for months, even years, to attain balance. One may learn from skilled teachers, follow detailed instructions, apply both gross and subtle adjustments. Still, the outcome may elude us. Each attempt is recorded by memory (*smṛti*), which tells us, “I always fall.” The repetition of this memory begins to define our identity as a practitioner: “I am not someone who can balance.” Yet everything can change in a single instant. A momentary shift—a flicker of lightness or poise—transforms the experience. That brief contact with balance doesn’t merely alter our understanding of the asana, it alters our perception of possibility. What was once deemed impossible becomes tangible, not because the body has changed dramatically, but because we have changed.

In that moment, something in the *citta*—the consciousness—opens. This is the core of skilful practice: the capacity to suspend judgement and remain present to what is, rather than what we expect or desire. It is the cultivation of unconditioned attention, a refined awareness that notices without interference, that explores without projecting outcomes. It does not seek to confirm its own narrative, but rather allows those narratives to dissolve.

To understand this fully, we must distinguish between two interwoven processes within practice. The first is discipline—the training of the mind, referred to as *manas* in Yogic terminology. In its untrained state, *manas* is restless. It jumps from thought to thought, led by attraction and aversion. It seeks novelty, pleasure, and affirmation. Practice disciplines *manas* by giving it a point of focus. Whether through seated pranayama, flowing sequences, or the intensity of a held asana, the aim is the same: to direct and anchor the mind in the present. In doing so, the mind begins to develop steadiness. We test our perceptions against experience, and slowly our understanding becomes more reliable. But this understanding is still conditioned—it is built from what we know, and it shapes what we are capable of seeing.

The second process, which we might call unconditional practice, emerges only after the first has been sustained. It is not the abandonment of discipline, but its transcendence. Where the first process organises the mind, the second begins to observe the deeper structure of consciousness itself—*citta*—and the modifications that arise within it, known as *vṛttis*. According to Patanjali, there are five *vṛttis*: correct perception, misperception or illusion, conceptualisation or delusion, sleep, and memory. Through deepening prac-

tice, the practitioner begins to discern how these movements that distort or colour our experience, and thus begins the work of un-colouring them.

A practitioner who moves toward unconditional practice ceases to rely on external authorities for validation. They recognise that even their own insights are timebound—that perception is filtered through layers of past conditioning. And so, they practise not to accumulate knowledge but to witness the unfolding of reality without imposition. This kind of knowledge is experiential, and it cannot be pre-formed. It arises spontaneously, born of presence. In this way, it fulfils the Yogic aphorism that describes practice as the pursuit of reality as it is—not as we wish it to be.

The conditioned mind, shaped by memory and desire, constantly seeks security in the known. It gravitates toward what is familiar and resists the unknown. It uses effort and concentration to narrow the field of awareness in order to hold on to what it recognises. But true understanding lies beyond the borders of the known. It emerges when we release the urge to control, when we stop asking practice to deliver a specific result.

To practise unconditionally is to step into the unknown each time we enter the practice environment. It is to bring a freshness of perception to each movement, each breath, and each pause. It is not passive or vague; rather, it is marked by discipline—a discipline that comes from attentive presence rather than force or defined by ideal forms. It is not bound by technique, though it may use technique. It is not indifferent to the body, though it is not limited to the body.

Such practice is creative. It listens, responds, and evolves. It is neither complacent nor ambitious. It recognises that every sensation, every difficulty, every unexpected moment can become the basis for deeper enquiry and understanding. It does not define experience in terms of right or wrong as even failure is part of the process and a path to understanding.

This article along with Alan's other writing, is available here: [Articles](#)

Yoga Sadhana & Yoga Syllabus



Yoga Sadhana & Syllabus

Yoga Mandir is guided by 2 significant documents.

Yoga Sadhana is our Student guide for each of the levels on the school and defines both practice and philosophy across 4 levels along with practice sequences, menstruation focus, restorative and Pranayama. It is an invaluable guide for students and teachers.

The Yoga Mandir Syllabus guides our teachers across 4 terms for each level of the school.

Yoga Sadhana can be purchased as a downloadable Pdf at [Yoga Vidya](#)

Parampara-Lineage

Interviews

The tradition of Parampara—the passing of knowledge from teacher to student—sits at the very heart of Yoga. More than a method of instruction, it is a transmission of understanding, grounded in direct experience and sustained by an enduring relationship. Unlike an academic syllabus or a procedural manual, Yoga is communicated through the living presence of a teacher who has themselves walked the path, refined their practice, and uncovered a way of seeing that cannot be captured through technique alone. It is in this context that the Guru-Sishya relationship arises: a dynamic exchange over time through which the student is drawn into the culture of practice and supported in the unfolding of their own enquiry.

As B.K.S. Iyengar often emphasised, we do not copy the teacher's form—we walk the path they reveal and come to our own insight through persistent practice. It is not the form of the practice that constitutes lineage, but the integrity of enquiry, the discipline of self-study (svadhyaya), and the transmission of subtle understanding from one generation to the next. To uphold Parampara is not merely to preserve a system but to enliven it—to engage fully with the process of becoming a practitioner.

In recognition of the centrality of lineage to our work, we will be conducting a series of interviews over the coming years with senior colleagues and long-standing practitioners from around the world. These conversations will explore how Parampara has been sustained in their own lives and practice, and how they transmit the values and disciplines of Iyengar Yoga within their communities. We hope these interviews will offer insight into the lived reality of lineage and the many forms it may take, while affirming the shared thread that connects us all.



Interview with Peter Thomson recorded in Australia in May 2025.

This excerpt from a longer interview in which Peter responds to a question about the nervous system.

the full recording of interviews will be made available in the foreseeable future

Yoga Vidya

A living resource of practice-based learning

For more than 25 years, Yoga Mandir's Digital Research Library (DRL) has quietly evolved into one of the most significant and unique archives of Iyengar Yoga around. The DRL includes video extracts from conventions, audio extracts from class recordings at RIMYI, and articles from a range of sources to enable students to listen to the Iyengar's in their own voice wherever possible, and to broaden their understanding of Iyengar Yoga and of Yoga as a subject. This extensive body of work is the result of decades of inquiry by Alan Goode, a senior teacher and long-time student of B.K.S. Iyengar. Alan's personal collection of notes and recordings and his systematic approach to collecting, consolidating and digitizing materials throughout his life have allowed him to create insights into understanding empirical knowledge on a profound scale.

The DRL is rooted in the Iyengar tradition and underpins our study platform Yoga Vidya, which reflects not only a sustained commitment to the system taught by B.K.S. Iyengar but also an ongoing attempt to examine and articulate its principles and link to the Yoga Sutras. Alan's philosophical training, combined with his experiential approach to Yoga as a living practice, has shaped the way this archive functions.

Subjects on Yoga Vidya are not merely a collection of information but are structured into parts using **Learn/Study/Practice** framework, which is consistent with the experiential learning paradigm used by Alan in his practice and teaching. These three strands define a way of engaging with Yoga. **Learn** introduces each topic providing a definition that supports a student's conceptual understanding. **Study** invites deeper philosophical reflection, introducing other voices and perspectives on the topic through articles, video extracts and audio excerpts. **Practice** applies these principles within practice through class recordings that can be followed by students.

What sets Yoga Vidya apart is its refusal to separate knowledge from experience. Yoga Vidya is a resource not only for current students, but an asset that is continually being developed and created for future generations of

teachers and practitioners seeking to understand the profound intelligence embedded in Iyengar Yoga.

This 3 minute video excerpt taken from the subject *T-Ph03 Kriyayoga* where Geeta Iyengar speaks about *how to get established in the practice* at the 2009 Yoga Convention in Australia.

Listen to her response



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