

Stephanie Quirk was born in NZ and began Iyengar Yoga in 1987 in Sydney. In the early 90's Stephanie began 20 years of study and assisting in general and therapeutic classes in the Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute, Pune, India (the source of Iyengar Yoga). She also became involved in the publications of Mr Iyengar's written works. From 2002 Stephanie began travelling and teaching at Iyengar Yoga institutes and schools worldwide. She continues to be actively involved in teaching and training teachers.

Can you define what yoga is?

In a word, 'no'. I practice yoga, I study yoga, I teach the practice of yoga to inquiring students. It is a process, which never ceases its flow. Undertaken as a practice it changes the practitioner, it is a constantly evolving environment, in which one's life is immersed. Over hundreds of years it has been variously described as restraining the fluctuations in the consciousness, as a sheltering monastery for those suffering from the worldly afflictions, as a stairway to reach the higher levels of living, sometime the path is described through the means by which it is undertaken, "Burning zeal in practice, self-study and study of scriptures, and surrender to the divine are the acts of yoga". For some it is like a tortoise, that which in firmness supports their entire world. The Bhagavad Gita describes it as the way in which one's actions become more and more skillful. The history of yoga is populated by humans undertaking its practice, and collections of advice from practitioners to others on how to proceed. There is no real academic study on the practice of yoga, academic study is on the texts of yoga.

What are the benefits of yoga and meditation generally?

Through the practice of yoga there are unique benefits. They are unique in that they happen simultaneously through many aspects and facets of our lives. Some of the signs that can be found in a person who practices regularly is good physical health in all the systems of the body, endurance, an alert and sensitive intelligence, friendliness towards others, generosity, and simple and ready offering of help to others where needed, joyfulness and curiosity. At the same time non-attachment and lessening reactivity towards unskillfulness in oneself and others.

There are a number of yoga styles therefore it's difficult for those who have never practiced yoga choose a style that suits their needs. What are the main differences between each style?

Really I can only report on Iyengar Yoga, as I haven't practiced any other method. The clear characteristic of Iyengar Yoga is that it works by engaging the practitioner in a systematic and intelligent approach. This approach simultaneously brings harmony through the physical, physiological, emotional and spiritual aspects of our selves. In an Iyengar class clear instructions are given to guide actions that are done with the body, breath and mind in unison. This co-ordination brings about a quality of experience that leads the student to experience inner balance. A trained Iyengar teacher will have know

how to organize class sessions, and have an experienced eye to see the student in the class and how to enable them by assisting them directly or with the use of props and materials.

Your journey started in 1987. Now you teach Iyengar Yoga to teachers. What is Iyengar Yoga and why did you choose this style?

In a way the answer is in the previous question. For me it wasn't so much that I "chose" Iyengar Yoga and rejected others. It was actually because of a friendship that I stepped through the doorway to yoga and it happened to be Iyengar Yoga. I went along to a class with a friend. I had already learnt meditation and had studied art and was working in psychiatry as a nurse. It was the change in my over all energy, the positivity that seemed to be present and not reliant on anything outside of myself. The more I went into the practice and learning the more I found it to be a support in my life. These are not so much reasons why I chose Iyengar Yoga, but reasons why I never left.

You have worked with people with vestibular disorders. How can yoga help the vestibular system?

Many of the Symptoms of vestibular disorders – tinnitus, vertigo, nausea, lack of confidence, anxiety can be helped through learning and practicing yoga, so long as the guide, the teacher is experienced and is aware of what is needed.

In particular, you have worked with Meniere's sufferers. Can you share your experience?

The first person with Meniere's I worked with was my mother. She already had yoga practice and was in India during the time I was studying at the main Yoga Institute in India. Geeta Iyengar (Mr Iyengar's daughter and one of the main Senior teachers at the institute) guided me with her.

She showed me how to specifically take my mother through poses so as to reduce her unsettling symptoms as well as stop them arising as she practiced one pose after the other. After that I had further opportunities to work with other students having the same condition.

Sufferers can have high stress levels and suffer anxiety. How can yoga help them?

Through correctly applied postures, the student gains stability. That sense of stability has a very real effect on the sufferer. This confidence in ones inner stability in turn leads to an improvement in self-confidence. They feel they can manage their situation on a daily basis, as well as unexpected episode of symptoms that may arise again.

What other stress management techniques would you recommend for the beginner?

Yoga through its limbs of asana and pranayama is a very holistic approach to well being. It is inherent in a well learnt practice that a very strong degree of mindfulness is developed and refined, this element of practice learnt in any method is a boon for suffer of vestibular disorders.

What qualifications are required to teach yoga or can anyone teach yoga? How do I know if a yoga teacher is qualified?

Perhaps the quality that is necessary to become a teacher is; patience, and dedication to ones own practice. As it is through ones own dedicated ongoing practice that the teacher develops has the felt understanding of how another person experiences them selves. It cannot be done by reading books and attending lectures. The training or preparation to become a teacher in the Iyengar Yoga system is extensive. There are hours of classes as a student, further hours are required in self-practice. There is the study of yoga texts. Most importantly the progress of the new teacher is over-seen and guided by a more experienced teacher. It is their teacher who, when they feel the student is ready, encourages them to go for the certifying examination. On the BKSIYA web site there is a list of all the certified teachers.

It is important to have some background on the yoga teacher. We are particularly interested in yoga for those with vestibular disorders. Does your training of yoga teachers cover vestibular disorders?

In the beginning the base teacher training does not cover specific remedial situations. The new teacher has to first learn to teach and guide others who are healthy. They first immerse themselves in the practice of yoga. From that base of yoga practice they begin to learn specific adaptations to benefit the various challenges that their students are facing. To understand and have the skill and confidence to handle conditions like vestibular disorders, special training and more importantly experience is required.

If one has never done yoga, is not fit or flexible, what can they expect?

Delight, as a well-trained teacher knows how to “enable” each student to be able to find their place in the practice, it is the practice that brings the benefits to the student.

When do you start seeing some benefits of yoga?

For me it was the first day, release of energy that is within the body.

How often should yoga be practiced?

Regularity is the quality needed, (more than a specific of the number of times a day or week). In the beginning when learning it will be a case of regularly attending a yoga class, then gradually the student is encouraged through stages to begin to build their own regular practices.

Are we ever too old to start yoga?

No, never too old, nor too young. Many studios have classes for +60years old as well as classes specifically aiming for including different groups (children, adolescents, aged people, pregnancy etc.,). Such specialized classes often offered in Iyengar Yoga studios means people from many different backgrounds and situations can receive instruction appropriate for them. People often feel yoga isn't for them because they see the model used for photo shoots in magazines and they feel it isn't for them, but actually all students are catered for.

You run workshops and mentoring programs at the Marrickville Yoga Centre¹ and I assume other centres in Sydney. Is this correct?

No, in Sydney I am based at the Marrickville Yoga Centre, teachers from other yoga centres bring their students to us in Marrickville, where we have a specific yoga therapy class time this purpose.

There I guide the teacher's who come with their students, so they can then work with them in their own studio. I am also often in communication with teachers I have instructed and guided all over the world. I am a mentor to them in the subject of yoga therapy. I can be contacted through the Marrickville Yoga Centre (see link below).

If one chooses Iyengar yoga in Sydney, who can they contact?

There is a web site of the Iyengar Yoga Association - <http://iyengaryoga.asn.au/>
Through the main menu, one can search for a school, or for a specific teacher.

¹ <https://www.marrickvilleyoga.com.au/>