

## BIOGRAPHY OF B.K.S. IYENGAR



B.K.S. Iyengar is one of the foremost teachers of yoga in the world and has been practicing and teaching for over 70 years. Millions of students now follow his method with Iyengar yoga centers all over the world. He has written many books on the art and science of yoga practice and its philosophy including the bestseller, *Light on Yoga*, and the new upcoming book, *Light on Life*.

Mr. Iyengar was born in 1918 into a large poor family in the village of Bellur in the Karnataka state in India, during an influenza epidemic leaving him sickly and weak. His father died when he was only nine years old. As a result, he went to live with his brother in Bangalore. His childhood was further marked by serious illnesses including malaria, tuberculosis and typhoid along with malnutrition.

At the age of 15, Mr. Iyengar moved to Mysore to live with his eldest sister and her husband, the accomplished yogi and Sanskrit scholar, Sri T. Krishnamacharya. Sri Krishnamacharya ran a yoga school in the palace of the Raja of Mysore and introduced Mr. Iyengar to some of the basic yoga postures (asanas) as a method to improve his

health. His teacher was an erratic and terrifying personality who drove him hard and explained almost nothing. At the beginning, Mr. Iyengar struggled from day to day. This diligence in practice gradually paid off, as he mastered some of the postures and as a result, his health improved.

Then in 1937, after only two years of study, Sri Krishnamacharya asked Mr. Iyengar to go to Pune to teach yoga. In Pune, he arrived nearly penniless, knowing no one and speaking only a little English. As he had left school before he completed his examinations and had no marketable skills, Mr. Iyengar's only way to make a living was by teaching yoga. With limited experience and almost no theoretical knowledge, he decided to practice with determination and learn directly for himself by trial and error. In the beginning, his few students were better than he was, so he would train himself as many as 12 hours each day, usually surviving on only stale bread and tea. Sometimes, he would suffer great pain through incorrect technique, often having to place heavy weights on his body to relieve the aches. However, refusing to give up, he gradually developed a deep personal understanding of the techniques of each posture and their effects. More yoga students began to seek him out. At that time, even in India, yoga was not widely practiced or understood.

In 1943, his brothers arranged his marriage to Ramamani. Mr. Iyengar had avoided marriage for some time as he felt he could not support a family, but on meeting her, consented. Slowly they worked their way out of poverty.

Gradually Mr. Iyengar's fame as a yoga teacher spread. In 1952, the world renowned violinist Yehudi Menuhin became a student of yoga during a visit to India.. Menuhin then arranged for Mr. Iyengar to teach in many cities in Europe. Mr. Iyengar made his first visit to the United States in 1956.

In 1966, Mr. Iyengar's first book, *Light on Yoga*, was published. It gradually became an international best-seller, eventually translated into 17 languages. Often called "the bible of yoga," it succeeded in making yoga truly universal. This was later followed by titles on pranayama and various aspects of yoga philosophy. In all, Mr. Iyengar has authored 14 books.

In 1975, Mr. Iyengar established the Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute in Pune, India, in memory of his recently departed wife, where he still resides and teaches today. By that time, Mr. Iyengar's eldest children, Geeta and Prashant, had also started teaching yoga under his guidance. The Institute quickly became an international center, attracting thousands of people from all over the world.



In 1984, Mr. Iyengar officially retired from daily teaching though he continues to direct medical classes and special events. He remains fully active in promoting yoga world wide and is personally involved in the institute and its charitable foundation. Though physically quite capable of continuing to teach, he felt it was time to "let the next generation come through" and did not want to become attached to his position there. The Institute continues to thrive with hugely popular programs and classes, conducted by Geeta, Prashant, and other senior Iyengar-trained teachers.

Mr. Iyengar is widely recognized as one of the premier yogis responsible for introducing yoga to the West. The Iyengar style yoga is probably the most widely practiced form of yoga in the world today. Mr. Iyengar is now 86 years old and still remains unsurpassed in his practice and teaching. He has been called "the Michelangelo of Yoga" and the "king of yogis." Largely because of his dedication to his own yoga practice and his unwavering commitment to share this ancient art with everyone, tens of millions of people all over the world are experiencing the benefits of yoga for themselves.

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