

RIMYI wishes to thank all members of our community who spent time reading, thinking and offering valuable feedback to the draft of the manual. We received over 700 responses from all over the world. This document answers commonly asked questions and concerns raised. The questions have been segregated topic-wise for ease of reading.

On the motivation behind the changes in the system:

1. Why does there have to be an overhaul of the system that has been functioning so well?

To understand why to overhaul the system, we need to have a look at “why the system came into existence?”. For that, let us start from the beginning.

The story of Iyengar Yoga began when a young boy named Sundararaja was sent to Pune by his guru T.Krishnamacharya. At that time, yoga was confined to the sections of hermits and sages. The one with an ardent desire to learn the subject was expected to go through rigorous scrutiny and only thereafter was initiation to yoga permissible. Naturally there were very few who could make it to their destination. Guruji abolished these biased filters and opened the doors of yoga to the common man.

For this, a structural framework was necessary, and it evolved over a period of time. We have to keep in mind the global context of yoga in that age. The Western world faintly knew it is an Indian philosophical system, but also thought of it as a mystical subject. Yoga was a sacred subject, and hence there were no resources available. From those meagre resources, Guruji formulated a well defined system which could produce predictable results. A subjective and philosophical subject, with Guruji’s efforts, slowly and steadily started entering the arena of science.

As his students grew and they started teaching yoga, he brought forth a well conceived syllabus for learning this subject. This has made it possible for people across the globe to access his teachings in his absentia. Thus the teachings of Guruji could be carried out precisely and this way he paid forward the grace of his guru. As Iyengar yoga started becoming popular, more and more people wanted to learn it. By giving certificates, Guruji took responsibility for his student’s knowledge. His framework of syllabus and method of teaching was so clear that his teachings could go to people in his absentia via his students. This was also the reason why he did not issue certificates for his students in Pune, because he was present.

Gradually Guruji gave authority to his senior students to decide who is qualified to promote the art, science and philosophy of Yoga according to his teachings and philosophy. The first certificates were given in 1968. He set up a system in the late 1970s and in 1980s, he established the current assessment system.

Guruji started teaching at a time when the only mode of learning was when the guru and shishya met face to face. Some of his students communicated with him through letters and at that time, letters from Europe to India took 21 days to reach. When that improved, there was still

no internet, no Youtube videos, no recordings of classes, no Light on Yoga and regular workshops or intensives on yoga. So detailed precise instructions, at times in immaculate detail was the necessity of the age. Addressal to every minute detail was of immense value as Gurujii was not available directly!

The last decade of the 20th century and the 21st century has seen a revolution. Communication between the two ends of the world are at the hit of a button. Teachers and students can communicate via various platforms. Answers to questions are a few seconds or a few clicks away. Information is rampant. Recordings are innumerable.

“In the 50s and 60s, I worked hard to popularise yoga; now I must work to correct the distortions that have appeared since that popularisation. On television and especially in physical fitness classes, yoga is being presented, not in its true form, but in a Westernised version that is more like any other form of physical exercise.”

- BKS Iyengar, 1977 Yoga Journal

If we struggle to hold on to the past, they will end up becoming mere rituals and anything done ritualistically without a subjective involvement will lead to stagnation.

“Stagnation is death.”

-B.K.S Iyengar

“This generation of students is very lucky because you have with you, my 80 years of wisdom” -B.K.S Iyengar, 2014

So, a strictly defined rigid system was a “MUST” at that time, but making the system more “user-friendly” is the need of the present era. Now that yoga is hugely popular, the responsibilities are different. Even though we are at an advantage because information and knowledge are available, we may falter if we stop at the objective elements. Objective components + Subjective components = Complete experience.

2. What is the core of the new system?

The core of the new system remains the same. It is about understanding Yoga through Gurujii’s teachings. Simplicity is the only added feature.

3. How is the new system not a deviation from the old system? Are we casting off B.K.S Iyengar’s contributions?

Can we?! The new system is made simpler in the context of the present generation. Whether you, as an interested student, or someone in the future - posterity will always have access to the old syllabus, have access to the foundation on which this system is based. This question is like refuting the contribution of one’s father in his or her existence. The old system is not trashed. No way! You can and should refer to it.

4. The world recognises Iyengar Yoga for its high standards. How will this change affect the existing standards?

High standards are achieved only with appropriate changes and adjustments introduced whenever necessary. Be assured, this change will add to the standards of Iyengar Yoga in this day and age. The assessors will continue to maintain a vigilant approach that will keep in mind the safety of the student community. The only change is it will happen in a simpler way.

5. Is RIMYI trying to “force” changes?

No. Based on the ideas and teachings of Gururji, RIMYI is outlaying a system that is contemporary and simpler.

On what the changes mean for the Associations and current certified teachers:

1. Is RIMYI taking away the autonomy of Associations?

No.

2. In the manual, you mention "RIMYI reserves the right to grant exceptions to the rules." Does this mean that any teacher can ask RIMYI directly without notifying their association?

Communication is vital. Any Association and RIMYI will keep each other informed about any such requests and decide on the course of action.

3. To me it is unclear whether teachers, who are currently certified will automatically obtain the corresponding level certification according to the new levels or need to go through an assessment anew?

No certified Iyengar Yoga teacher in good standing needs to undergo any assessment to obtain the equivalent level of certification. The table mentioning the comparison is only for reference for:

- upgradation in future
- knowing what syllabus you are expected to be well versed with according to the new system.
- Training, mentoring and assessing in the future.

It does not in any sense refute or discard the previous system or the teachers certified in it. NO WAY!

Yoga is not like any gadget wherein when a new version is introduced, the earlier one becomes obsolete.

4. Is my certificate going to be replaced?

No. Your current certificates remain valid.

5. How will this change affect students who come to our classes?

The students will only benefit from this change as their horizons will be opened out.

6. I have been cast away in a box with the juniors. I am devastated. How can you undermine all my time, efforts and money to reach where I am today like this?

Are juniors so scary? Different categorisation does not have the intent to demean anybody.

Please be assured that THIS IS NOT A DEMOTION IN ANY SENSE WHATSOEVER.

This new system is outlined for assessments that will happen hereafter. Certified teachers will continue their functionalities and responsibilities as they did until this change was made. All your existing certificates are valid for as long as you are alive. Nobody can take away your knowledge, maturity and goodwill that you have earned and they are bound to radiate now and in the future.

7. I don't understand why teacher training becoming a business is necessarily a bad thing. I feel as though there is something more to this that needs to be explained. I run a yoga studio. It is a business. There's no inherent problem with that. I run the business ethically. It's how teaching of yoga is done everywhere.

The goal of any business is profit and the aim of a yoga teacher is giving benefit to society.

There is a difference in priority settings between benefit and profit. When profit is the primary focus; exploitation, not opulently but subtly, is the hidden method. This should not be the case.

Intention of teaching yoga and benefiting the society should never be adulterated. We acknowledge the financial component in teaching yoga. That expenditures have to be met is a reality. But it should not be at the cost of substituting 'yoga' with 'business yoga'.

On transition:

1. How do you envision this transition to take place?

Basically this transition must not be perceived as a calamity. It is an attempt to rejuvenate Iyengar Yoga by making it simpler and user-friendly.

We will need a soft approach for this transition. Each Association is requested to adopt a mechanism that they deem fit to enable this transition in their region. Be assured that the transition will not be a hasty process.

2. What will be the role of our senior teachers in this transition?

Senior teachers are "SENIORS" in our system. Their practice, maturity and wisdom is and will never be questioned. Their role will remain the same - to teach to impart experience and knowledge. Now they have an added responsibility to ease this process of transition.

3. Why is visiting RIMYI mandatory? It is impossible to leave my kids and work for a month. I have other concerns like my health, environment.

Considering family issues, work and financial constraints, visit to RIMYI is no longer mandatory for teachers. However, since the certificates will be issued by RIMYI, this condition will remain mandatory for trainers, mentors and assessors for certain levels.

Regarding the financial constraints to visit RIMYI, you can write to your Association. The Association and RIMYI can discuss if this can be eased in any way.

4. Visit to RIMYI must be made mandatory for all levels of certification. Why don't you add this clause for Level 1 also?

While RIMYI welcomes with open arms whoever wishes to visit and learn at the mother institute, it acknowledges that some people will be unable to undertake a visit to RIMYI because of various constraints. We do not want to deprive such people the chance to proceed in the path of certification.

5. Why can't we have a standalone therapeutics programme that is open for all CIYTs since you are changing the system?

Guruji applied his knowledge of asanas and pranayama to help people with ailments. The starting point for therapeutic application of asanas and pranayama is understanding the asanas and pranayama. If one learns the basics of asana and pranayama, its application can be taught.

6. How will you ensure that current teachers are well-versed in the syllabus that they are not assessed for?

It is not feasible and not fair to undergo a separate assessment process for existing certified teachers. Each Association can outline if they want to set up a standard way for the teachers to be well-versed with the new syllabus. RIMYI recommends contacting your senior teachers/trainers/mentors and tapping on available resources by B.K.S Iyengar, Geeta Iyengar and Prashant Iyengar as options.

7. This new system takes away from the goals and structure that we are used to. Having different levels meant we could strive to attain that level. What are we to do now?

Motivation comes from within. By taking down the number of levels, if you are feeling demotivated, you have to question yourself - "Why am I doing this?"

If it is only an external impetus that makes us do things, how long is it going to last? We can never be certain of the things around us. The world around us is ever-changing.

8. Can you please offer a short clarification of the key words under the eligibility section - zeal and ardent?

These two words, zeal and ardent, have interesting origins.

Zeal, initially was related to "jealousy" and ardent has its root in "arduous", which in turn is from the word "orthos"- straight, upright.

Arduous got its metaphorical connection, difficult and laborious, later.

So how do 'jealousy', 'difficult' and 'laborious' contribute to a subject like yoga?

Jealousy is considered "not so correct", but can have a unique quality.

It can ignite the fire within, to be better than..... This makes one work hard and incessantly.

Considering this context, jealousy is related to burning desire within to be better. In yogic sadhana comparison has to be with oneself. Am I better than yesterday? Is my sadhana getting texturally rich every day? If these things are observed meticulously, distraction from the path of sadhana is unlikely. Ardent, as stated above, has three connections.

- Straight - without distraction,
- Upright - observing yamas and niyamas in Ashtanga yoga,
- Difficult, laborious - these narrate the yogic sadhana in nutshell.

So, “ardent” in yogic perspective can be defined as a difficult and laborious sadhana done while observing yamas and niyamas with complete concentration and focus on the goal to be achieved.

When we add zeal to this definition, it brings in the mental facet of sadhana, which is, observation with incessant assessment of oneself.

In this way, zeal and ardent are two important pillars of yogic sadhana. One states the mental facet while the other denotes the physical element.

On changes in the syllabus:

1. The syllabus feels like you want to encourage only young, fit people to become teachers. Is that the case?

No. The pursuit of asanas has different flavours in different phases of life. A youngster likes to be challenged and hence the physically demanding poses appeal to him. Later on, the interest moves from the physical plane to the plane of sensation and perception. A teacher should be equipped with the knowledge to teach one and all - young, old, stiff, flexible.

2. Forcing so many asanas within a level goes against the safety that our system stood for. Do we no longer value safety in our method?

Anything done with force is non-sustainable. None of Gururji’s teachings has ever endorsed use of force. His instructions guide us with such meticulous details that make the use of force alien. Force implies doing something against somebody’s desire. Do we ever do that? The teacher/trainer/mentor/recommending teacher has to decide who can do what and how. This demands discrimination. The reduction in the number of certification levels is merely to make the system simpler and create more freedom in learning.

3. Gururji said do not teach what you cannot practice. Now it appears that one can teach even if one cannot do a certain pose. How can you bring such a radical change?

In this question, we feel sorry to say that the essence of Gururji’s statement is being ignored. Practice or knowledge of asanas has three components:

1. Thorough understanding
2. Translation of that understanding into actions in the asanas

3. Accurate demonstration.

Guruji was adept at all three. We should strive for at least 2 of these 3 qualities to be a teacher. For e.g. an 80 year old senior teacher in our system will not be able to do Paschimottanasana as per Light on Yoga or as he did in his youth. However would it be right to say this person should hence not teach at all?

Second consideration is about ethicality. In teaching yoga, one is answerable to oneself. Consider a teacher who has never accomplished Adho Mukha Vrksasana. He will simply not have the raw material to teach it. He has to ask the question to himself and seek an honest answer. However, if the teacher knows Adho Mukha Vrksasana (knows by experience) and there are youngsters in a class, the teacher now has the freedom to separate these youngsters in the same class and make them do Adho Mukha Vrksasana.

Rather than quoting Guruji verbatim, we should make an attempt to decipher the philosophy in his words.

4. Is it not a bad idea to discard the steps that Guruji gave in learning an asana?

According to the old system, there would be a few countries where there is no one qualified to teach Urdhva Dhanurasana classically. While any asana taught in a wrong manner is harmful, not being able to teach Urdhva Danurasana at all, deprives an entire community from being introduced to that asana. Here the question of individual ethicality comes in. Should I teach or should I not?

We are all aware of the fact that, to learn any asana safely, resources are available. (Still, a teacher is the best option). We should see what B.K.S Iyengar, Geeta Iyengar and Prashant Iyengar have said about them. Our study has to include all these resources.

5. Why have you changed the pranayama syllabus? How can I approach this with my mentor?

The pranayama syllabus has also been changed with the same intent - to make things simpler. The responsibility is on the teacher to guide the student in the art of learning pranayama using the book Light on pranayama as a base.

6. Why is there little focus on pranayama?

“Asana is a perceptual subject. Pranayama is a conceptual subject.”

-B.K.S Iyengar

The learnings in Pranayama have not been lessened. All types of Pranayama that Guruji has taught is a part of our syllabus. However, assessment of Pranayama is not possible. Pranayama is a sadhana of and for sensitivity. The routine proverb, “You can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink” holds true for Pranayama also. It is the teacher's responsibility to ensure that the student is well versed with the Pranayama syllabus of his level.

7. The sequential method of introducing asanas is lost. Why does the syllabus not refer to different methods of approaching an asana, the use of props?

Let us consider an example. When a daughter enters into a relationship, is the daughter lost? No! She has adopted a new role. She has transformed from one phase to another. The sequential method is available in the old syllabus and the teachers should refer to it. Props remain an integral part of our school. However, many Iyengar Yoga teachers do not have the luxury of being equipped with props. Some teachers teach outdoors, where even a wall is not available. Therefore props cannot be made a mandatory tool.

As a teacher, it is your foremost responsibility to give what you have received. Therefore the different methods of approaching an asana must be taught by the teacher.

On Mentoring:

1. In this day and age, are teachers redundant?

Though information (whether in books or the internet) is a huge advantage in learning, asana and pranayama are best learnt under the watchful eye of a teacher because of the direct contact that is established between the teacher and student. The art of adjustment is inevitable in learning any art form involving the body. Therefore, there is no substitute for a good teacher whatsoever.

2. It is not easy or financially viable to find a mentor living in rural areas or small countries. Who can mentor me in such situations?

This is a valid concern. In such situations, please write to your Association. They will guide you in this matter. If there is no Iyengar Yoga Association in your country, write directly to RIMYI.

3. Are mentors and recommending teachers one and the same?

Not necessary, but they can be. Mentor is a close associate in your path to yoga. Your mentor knows you, your situation, history, strengths, weaknesses, fears and delights. When your mentor sends you to an assessment, your mentor knows the process you are being put through. It is beneficial to have a mentor.

Compared to this, a recommending teacher has limited association with the student. They gauge you on the basis of the limited interactions that have happened. They may not be aware of you as a person, as a yoga sadhaka.

Recommending teachers do not translate into mentors, unless they commit themselves to the task of mentorship.

4. What should I, as a student expect from my mentor and vice versa?

Mentor is your close confidante on the yogic path.

Maitri karuna mudita upeksanam sukha duhkha punya apunya visayanam bhavanatah cittaprasadanam

“Through cultivation of friendliness, compassion, joy and indifference to pleasure and pain, virtue and vice respectively, the consciousness becomes favourably disposed, serene and benevolent.” ~ Light on Yoga Sutras of Patanjali I.33

Mentors have concern, compassion, joy and involvement in your evolution. If you are under the care of a mentor, you can be assured that the mentor has walked the path and is going to walk the path with you.

What a mentor should expect from a student, questions like this will not arise in the mind of the mentor. Don't worry.

On changes in the assessment process:

1. As an assessor, I don't know how I can practice or establish a rapport with a candidate that I am assessing. Isn't there a conflict there?

Assessment is a process of welcoming. The candidate has shown interest by appearing for the assessment. It is the duty of the assessor to greet the candidates, make them feel comfortable and then gently check their preparations. In a subject like yoga, assessment can never be 100% objective. It necessarily involves emotions. In India, one who shares food, sorrows and joy is considered a family member. In this context, the assessor is the elderly person in our family who has seen life. When they extend their good wishes, imagine how newcomer (candidate) is going to feel! The assessor has the capacity to interact, practice and assess simultaneously. If you think deeper, interaction and practice are an integral part of assessment. If the result doesn't suit the candidate, and you have built a rapport with the candidate, the candidate is not going to be demoralised but instead be inspired to do better.

2. As an assessor I don't know how I would practice with the candidates. The mental processes of assessing and practicing are, in my experience, very different. How will this work?

Yoga is unification, not segregation. A performer is a silent observer. While Guruji was demonstrating in a class, he was doing and at the same time teaching, observing and assessing his students. Practising together is a means to unravel together some concepts of asanas. It can be a good mode of knowledge as there are different minds working together.

Self-practice is another type of practice where one can be completely inward, oblivious to the world outside. As an assessor, your maturity by now, should be of a level where this role can be easily played.

3. There is a 60 minute practice, then a long interaction. What happened to abhyasa and vairagya?

It is a misconstrued notion that abhyasa, practice and doing the asanas all correspond to the same thing. Patanjali mentions abhyasa as an effort to restrain the fluctuations of consciousness. The attributes of abhyasa are:

- Long duration
- Uninterruptedly
- With reverence.

With the right understanding of yoga, practice of asanas can be abhyasa and vairagya, independently and simultaneously too.

4. Shouldn't the candidate already know about the 'fabric of Iyengar yoga'. As an assessor what should I talk about it?

Because you have been on the path for a longer duration of time, you have your pearls of wisdom to share. Your sensitive practice not only contributes to better insights in a posture, they also add to the value of understanding that can throw light on hidden gems. You are going to teach a class, where the fabric would be seamlessly demonstrated.

5. Why can't I take notes during assessment?

For candidates who exude confidence, this doesn't matter. For the others, it can be an intimidating experience. The candidate's major focus may get shifted to what is being written in the notes, rather than being involved with what he or she is doing. For the benefit of the larger audience, we feel the assessors will be able to conduct an assessment successfully without notes. Still, if you feel the need, you can make notes after the candidate's presentation is over.

6. Why are the 'objective' methods of scoring each pose being replaced with this 'subjective' approach of scoring as a whole?

As Guruji stated, yoga is not only subjective, but emotional too. Objective assessment tends to neglect this aspect. Here, we have to understand we are not discarding objective framework. The dryness and aridity in an assessment will definitely be replaced by tender subjective participation.

7. Existing criteria for assessment are Alignment, Extension, Directionality, Steadiness and Stability, and Precision. These criteria have not been mentioned in the proposal. Are they no longer to be assessed?

These are essential objective features of our school. On these, the assessor has to base his or her subjective reading. These criteria have not been mentioned explicitly because they are expected to be present implicitly in the decision making process.

8. What if I forget the feedback I wanted to give the candidate?

If you feel you may forget, you can make notes in between sessions or before the next candidate walks in.

9. What is the purpose/goal of the Individual Presentations? Will the other candidates be in the room? How much should the candidate speak?

Individual presentation is a "publicly private time" for the candidate. The skill sets and nuances they want to present gets space. They can display their strengths. Whether the other candidates should be in the room can be decided based on the comfort level of each candidate.

10. Why is there so much focus on 'communication'?

The prefix “com” denotes coming together, joining etc; as in communion, commemorate. Yoga also has the same root - “yuj” - to join, to yoke, to unite. Our assessment should be a process of congregation and not separation. The only way to achieve this is “communication”. We need to and have to focus on “excellent and proper communication”.