

YOGA AND AGING

SHIFTING
PERSPECTIVE
sponsored by ARTEMIS
YOGA

How to Sync the Practice with the Aging Process with Eyal Shifroni April 2, 2023

(The following text is an excerpt from my blog. You are encouraged to read the entire post [on my site](#)).

We shouldn't limit our practice prematurely, nor try to ignore the fact that we are aging, and attempt to maintain the same practice as if nothing has changed. **Both attitudes are not in sync with the reality of aging.** Some age mentally faster than physically and unnecessarily limit themselves, being too cautious in their practice (and life), overtaken by fear. Others deny the aging process and attempt to keep the same practice regardless of their age.

Some use age as an excuse as to why not practice, as B.K.S. Iyengar wrote in [The Tree of Yoga](#):

"Why is an old man fond of sex? Why does his age not come to his mind at all? If he sees a young woman his mind will be wandering, even though he may have no physical capacity. What is the state of his mind? He would like to possess her, would he not? But ask him to do a little yoga, or something to maintain his health. 'Oh, I am very old', he says".

Iyengar himself continued to practice, until his last days, when he was over 95! His practice changed a lot over the years and in old age, he used many props and focused on inversions and backbends with support. If our practice over the years was correct and we have developed sensitivity and wisdom, we would know how to sync our practice with the aging process, neither overdoing nor underdoing.

Aging is not only about decline. We also refine our practice as we age. Iyengar's practice in his 70s was more precise, mature, and beautiful than in his younger years (there is an

inspiring set of photos that demonstrate it by comparing photos from *Light on Yoga* with photos of his practice when he was seventy years old). He wrote (in *The Tree of Yoga*):

“Learning is a delight, and there are many delights to be obtained from the practice of yoga. But I am not doing it for the delight... The sensitivity and intelligence which have been developed should not be lost. That is why the practice has to continue.”

Aging enables more depth that comes with experience and wisdom, and that has many benefits and joys. We don't need to prove ourselves; we learn to accept ourselves as we are. We have more time; we are out of the 'rat race' so we can devote more time to practice without worrying about worldly issues.

We become like old trees that bear sweet fruits, trees that offer shelter and shade. There is great joy in giving, in teaching from our wisdom and experience. There is also joy in the appreciation we receive from our students. While in the technological professions, one is considered irrelevant after 40, in yoga, the more experience one gains, the better teacher he or she becomes!

Aging also forces us to be more considerate and kinder to our body, to our vulnerability, weakness and limitations – this teaches us consideration and compassion. Our practice becomes more profound and we rip the fruits of our many years of devoted practice. It's a great joy! Rather than being egocentric and taking from the world, we can now give more to our students and to the world.

Sequence for Yoga & Aging

In the workshop, I will suggest different ways to perform the given sequence of asanas. Specifically, we (me and the demonstrators) will demonstrate three different versions for each asana, from the more challenging, (almost) independent performance, to a supported version of the same *asana*, using props that allow everyone to perform it.

The participants will be able to choose the version that suits them best, according to their physical capacity (or limitations)

Yoga and Aging: Shifting Perspective
How to Sync the Practice with the Aging Process
 Eyal Shifroni

Asana	More challenging	In between	Supported
Invocation	Svastikāsana sitting on bolster	Vīrāsana on a bolster	Sitting on a chair
Adho Mukha Śvānāsana preparation – hands on wall			
Adho Mukha Śvānāsana	Classic ^[1]	Hands on blocks	Hands on chair
Parvatāsana	In Padmāsana or Svastikāsana	In Vajrāsana	On chair
Gomukhāsana (optionally using a belt)	Classic	Sitting in Vajrāsana with a blanket behind the knees	Sitting on a chair
Standing Asanas			
Utthita Trikoṇāsana	Back foot against the wall, block for the hand	Back to a chair	Back to the wall, chair in front
Vīrabhadrāsana II	Back foot and hand against the wall	Back to a chair	Sitting on the chair
Vīrabhadrāsana I	Back foot against the wall. Belt for elbows	In front of a chair, holding the back bar	Sitting on the chair
Adho Mukha Śvānāsana	Classic	Hands on blocks	Hands on a chair
Adho Mukha Vīrāsana	Classic	Elbows and forehead on a bolster	Hands on a chair, buttocks on a bolster

Śīrṣāsana	Classic	With blocks supporting the dorsal spine	On two chairs (or two piles of foams)
Backbends Asanas			
Ūrdhva Mukha Śvānāsana	Hand on blocks	Hands on the seat	Against the wall
Uṣṭrāsana	Hands on blocks (or bolster placed on the ankles)	Folded chair supporting the upper chest	Back of the neck supported by the back bar
Ūrdhva Dhanurāsana	Back on the back bar, hands against the wall	Sitting in front of a chair and arching to catch the back bar	Sitting on the chair and arching on the back bar
Ūrdhva Dhanurāsana	Hands on blocks	Back on the back bar, hands against the wall	On chair and bolster
Setu Bandha Sarvāṅgāsana	Arching from Sarvāṅgāsana to place the feet against the wall	On a block (or 2 blocks) under the sacrum, feet against the wall, belt looped on the thighs	On lengthwise bolster, feet supported on a block and against the wall

From here we shift to a single option

- Ardha Halāsana with a chair or Paśchimottānāsana with a chair
- Prānāyāma lying down
- Prānāyāma sitting on a chair
- Śavāsana with blocks on the hands

[1] 'Classic' means as shown in *Light on Yoga*

Quotes Presented in the Workshop

“If I were to do yoga today just as I did it when I began in 1934, then my practice would be like a healthy tree which doesn’t give any fruit, ... I am not doing that type of yoga I want my action to bear fruit. ... The yogi’s interest is to keep the head and the heart clean through the harmony of breath...”

- B.K.S. Iyengar, *The Tree of Yoga, the Leaves*

“The severity of practice by itself is not the yardstick for measuring success. A pure mind and a right intention are necessary. Yoga must be done gradually. The yoga pose is not the goal. Becoming flexible or standing on your hands is not the goal. The goal is to create space where you were once stuck. To unveil layers of protection you have built around your heart. To appreciate your body and become aware of the mind and the noise it creates.

To make peace with who you are. The goal is to love...well, you.

Shift your focus and your heart will grow.”

- Geetaji Iyengar

“It’s never too late in life to practice yoga. If it were, then I should have stopped my practice long ago. Why should I do so now? ...

Learning is a delight, and there are many delights to be obtained through the practice of yoga. But I am not doing it for delight! In the early days delight was the aim, but now it’s a byproduct. The sensitivity of intelligence which has been developed should not be lost.

That is why the practice has to continue”.

- B.K.S. Iyengar, *The Tree of Yoga, Old Age*