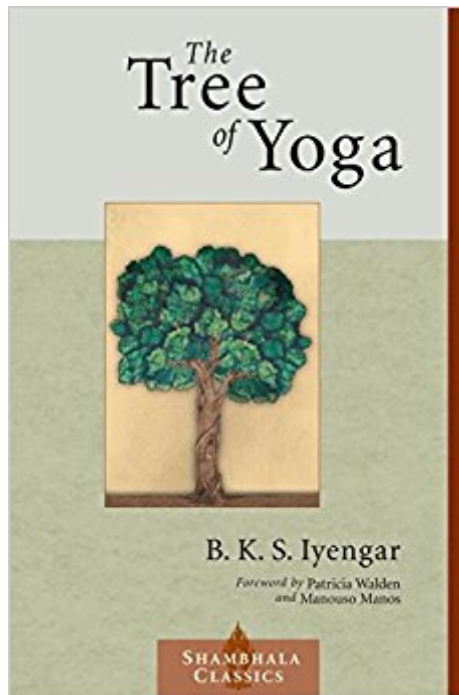




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# The Tree Of Yoga (Shambhala Classics)



## Synopsis

Iyengar developed a form of yoga that focuses on developing strength, endurance, correct body alignment, as well as flexibility and relaxation. The Iyengar method integrates philosophy, spirituality, and the practice of yoga into everyday living. In *The Tree of Yoga*, Iyengar offers his thoughts on many practical and philosophical subjects including family life, love and sexuality, health and the healing arts, meditation, death, and Patanjali's Yoga Sutras. This new edition features a foreword by Patricia Walden, a leading American teacher of the Iyengar style.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Valuable insights into the therapeutic nature of yoga. . . . Those already familiar with Iyengar's work will find subtlety and depth here that will increase with each rereading." — Yoga Journal

"The well known Iyengar, a yoga teacher for fifty years and family man with six children, offers valuable teachings that are consistently lucid, inspiring, and instructive." — East West

One of the world's foremost teachers of yoga offers his thoughts on many practical and philosophical subjects, ranging from the place of yoga in daily life to insights from Patanjali's "Yoga Sutras". --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

While I find I enjoy and benefit from anything Iyengar writes, I was actually more impressed by this book than I had expected to be. I did not go into it with any particular expectations--perhaps that

helped--except the very positive reviews on . It is not an asana book, and Iyengar not being a scholar (he does not even have a high school degree he says on page 28, and was a "dumb student"), it is not a "learned" tome of any sort. This book is, rather, a subtle, gentle, at times revealing, and quite elegantly written series of reflections on the practice and teaching of yoga. Mr. Iyengar may not have been much of a student (what does this say about schools, I wonder?), but this book is clearly the product of an intelligent, discerning, and dedicated life. It is divided into five parts: (1) "Yoga and Life," with essays describing generally the traditional Hindu view of the life process and how yoga fits in with that; (2) "The Tree and Its Parts," where the eight limbs defined in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras are described; (3) "Yoga and Health," which is pretty self-explanatory; (4) "The Self and Its Journey," examining the higher practices of pranayama and meditation leading to samadhi; and (5) "Yoga In the World," which has only two essays, the first about yoga as an art form, the second about the requirements and responsibilities of yoga teachers. Although Iyengar does quote a bit of Sanskrit here and there, I would not say any of the essays are particularly "technical," though this is certainly not to say they are at all superficial. Quite the opposite--this book could not have been written by someone who was anything less than a master of his field, with long years of experience and reflection. Which leads me to say that although anyone can read this book--beginner or advanced, the merely curious to the hardcore--what you get out of it will definitely be determined by the depth of your own practice. Many rereadings, particularly when one is at different stages of development, or when one has perhaps crossed the line from student to teacher, will no doubt yield new insights and understandings. I'd like to share a few points of what, for me, were highlights. Mr. Iyengar has a way with analogies, and a brilliant one is found on page 17, where the four original castes (peasant, merchant, warrior, priest) are compared to attitudes or states of mind. His essay entitled "Childhood" (20) was simply beautiful, and I found the description of some of his life contained in "Family Life" (27) very inspiring. The second part of the book is an excellent overview of yoga practice as a way of meditation and illumination; I thought in particular the notion of the Eight Limbs (ashtanga) of Patanjali as a hologram (see "The Roots," page 50) to be nothing if not brilliant. There are, in fact, many very insightful and illuminating passages in this section, things I never thought about in quite that way. His discussion of yoga as a healing art (especially from p. 93ff) was very interesting--I wish he would write a whole book devoted to his experiences in this regard. I could go on, as there are many excellent passages, but lastly I will cite p. 117ff as a brilliant evocation of why the Buddhist practice of mindfulness is so easily in accordance with the practice of asanas. Iyengar writes: "Consciousness is always present in our finger, but most of the time we are not aware of it, so the consciousness of the finger is dormant."

You should know the difference between consciousness and awareness. Consciousness exists everywhere in the body. When you are walking, if a thorn touches your foot, what happens? It pricks, and you immediately feel the pain, so you cannot say that consciousness was not there. But until the thorn pricked you, you were not aware of your foot. The consciousness in your foot was dormant, but the moment the foot was pricked, it was brought to the surface. To awaken that dormant consciousness is awareness. Your consciousness is six feet long, or five and a half feet long in your body--it is as long as your body is tall. But awareness is small. Awareness may extend two feet, one foot, one inch or half an inch. The yogi says that by practising asanas, you can bring awareness to an extension equal to that of consciousness. This is total awareness. This is meditation."Mr. Iyengar is of course a hatha yogin, and while practicing asanas may take you a long ways, I do not feel it is a substitute for a hard-core sitting practice. This may be the area where he comes up short, and indeed, the only passage of the book that I thoroughly disagreed with revealed this. On p. 139 he writes:"If you work diligently on asana, pranayama and pratyahara, you will receive your reward of dharana, dhyana and samadhi, which are the effects of that practice. They CANNOT BE PRACTISED DIRECTLY [emphasis added]. If we say that we are practising them, this means that we do not know the earlier aspects of yoga. It is only by practising the earlier aspects that we can hope to arrive at their effects."I don't agree with this at all. In fact, as a statement of the reality of meditation practice (especially in the Buddhist tradition, pick your yana), it is patently false. All over the Buddhist world (not to mention the Christian, Muslim, Jain, Hindu, etc), people come to meditation without ever having practiced asanas or pranayama, and many of them do just fine. Might they benefit from asanas? Of course! But, as Iyengar showed quite eloquently, the Path can be approached and the Goal attained through any of the limbs of yoga (though some are more direct and less time-consuming). While I do not wish to make overmuch of this one little misstep in an otherwise superb book, I do think it points out a shortcoming in Iyengar's approach, which appears marked by an imbalance favoring asanas over direct meditation practice. This aside--which is just my nitpicking--I cannot recommend this book enthusiastically enough to anyone exploring the world of yoga. Read it, practice, reflect, and reread it. Do not read it for information, rather for grounding, seasoning, maturation. If yoga is a tree (and since Mr. Iyengar says it is, who are we to argue?) then read it and learn to think like a tree--to make my own unworthy stab at a different sort of analogy!

Assigned reading for a yoga philosophy course as a part of yoga teacher training. Loved the subject material and way it was presented. I would have read it even if it wasn't assigned reading. A must

for any serious student of yoga!

Wonderful reference book that explains the philosophy of yoga in simple terms. It helped me to understand why the symbol of the tree is so helpful to my practice and gives me something to aspire as I continue learning.

In yoga circles, Mr. Iyengar taught many of our teachers' teachers. His attention to posture details and teaching method are renowned. And yet we rarely have a chance to hear his thoughts on the place of yoga practice and teaching in the contemporary world. The 36 short essays in this reader give us such an opportunity. Each little essay is compact and addresses a single reflection. This enables the reader to take in the theme and then spend time considering its importance for his or her practice or teaching. Never has Iyengar been more digestible. Recommended reading for thoughtful yogis and interested observers of the spiraling yoga phenomenon in America and around the world.

A must read to deeply connect to the practice of Yoga and how the understanding of a constant, dedicated practice can transform your life.

Changed my whole perspective. Great knowledge.

just started this and loving it already

Every yogi and yoga teacher should have this book on their shelf. Go-to good read.

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