

Iyengar Yoga in Bath



The new Bath Iyengar Yoga Centre opened its doors for classes in April 2006. Tucked away in a quiet riverside enclave in the heart of Bath yet just a few minutes walk from the mainline station, it is a beautiful contemporary space, fully equipped for Yoga.

Run by husband and wife team Richard and Kirsten Agar Ward, it aims to be a centre of excellence for Yoga in the South West: 'We aim to teach with purity and with complete respect for our Gurujī's teachings.' The couple has almost half a century's Iyengar Yoga experience and nearly 40 years' Iyengar Yoga teaching experience between them. They settled in Bath seven years ago and established a studio in their home but soon realised they needed to expand. 'We were bursting at the seams in our home studio and we feel the subject and those who wish to study it deserve a clean, properly equipped, dedicated Yoga space. There is a positive vibration that comes from having a space devoted solely to Yoga'

Richard holds the Senior Intermediate Level 3 Iyengar Yoga Teaching certificate and Kirsten the Junior Intermediate Level 3 Iyengar Yoga Teaching Certificate. Richard is an approved teacher trainer and trains Iyengar teachers in Bath and London. He is also a Moderator and Teacher Assessor for the Iyengar Yoga Association of the UK (IYAUK). He has studied at the Iyengar Institute in Pune on 14 occasions. Kirsten is a Teacher Assessor for the IYAUK and has studied at the RIMYI in Pune 5 times.

Richard started Yoga whilst studying at Oxford University and soon discovered it that he did not want to follow any other way of life. He was extremely fortunate to be taught by Yogacharya Sri B.K.S. Iyengar after only having practised for 1 year, during Sri Iyengar's visit to London in 1976. 'The moment I saw him I realised this man was completely genuine and I could trust him completely.' Since then he has studied with him many times, including 14 visits to Sri Iyengar's Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute in Pune. After completing his honours degree in Modern History and a PGCE Richard began teaching Iyengar Yoga full time and has never looked back. 'Once I took up Iyengar Yoga I knew there was nothing else I wanted to do more with my life and I felt that becoming a teacher of Yoga could be a way to pass on some of the benefits of this wonderful subject to people. It could be a way to pass on to others some of what Gurujī's teaching meant to me'.

Kirsten also studied at Oxford University, gaining an honours degree in Experimental Psychology, and then went on to become a school teacher and then an Educational Psychologist for 12 years

before taking up Iyengar Yoga teaching full time. 'I always wanted to work in a field involving helping others' she says 'and gradually became more and more disillusioned with my work and all the red tape. I wanted to be a practitioner not a bureaucrat. At the same time I gradually became more and more interested in my Yoga practice and sharing it with others and trained to be an Iyengar Yoga teacher. To a great extent I see what I do now as a natural progression from my previous work. However, I find that Yoga offers a more complete understanding of what it is to be human, since it puts spirituality at the heart of things.'

Although they have been conducting classes in the new Yoga space since April it was September before it was formally inaugurated by their friend and fellow Iyengar Yoga Teacher Sri Faeq Biria Faeq, who runs the Iyengar Yoga Centre of Paris conducted a special 'puja' ceremony on 2nd September to bless the Centre, its teachers & students. Afterwards the guests joined in a splendid South Indian Vegetarian meal. It is hoped that this auspicious ceremony will bring blessings on the Centre and further its aims of bringing health, happiness and peace to its students. The event also raised £1200.00 for BKS Iyengar's Bellur Trust charity which aims to improve the quality of life for the villagers of the poor south Indian village of Bellur (BKS Iyengar's birthplace) in the areas of education,



Richard and Kirsten Agar Ward



health and culture (see December 2006 issue). On the next day Faeg conducted an intermediate level Iyengar class with practitioners attending from all over the UK as well as Bath.

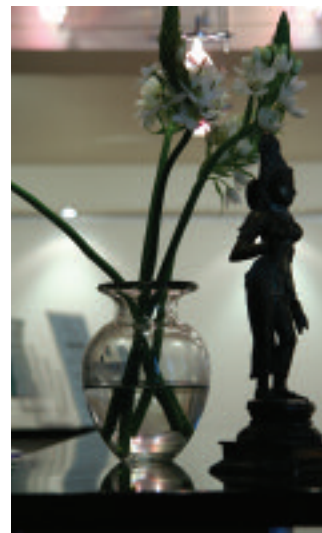
Puja is very important to the Agar Wards. They try to perform daily puja together as a family at home and at the centre. They see chants as a powerful way of getting in touch with our deeper selves. In accordance with Guruji Iyengar's wishes, all classes begin with the invocation to Patanjali, author of the Yoga Sutras, as a way of paying respect to him and seeking his blessings on the practice and establishing a mind set which is quiet, reverential and humble and as such more fitting for Yoga practice.

Since its opening the Centre has seen hundreds of Yoga pupils, both experienced and new, attending weekly classes and special courses. Richard and Kirsten have an extensive timetable with classes, including regular pranayama, for all levels and ages from complete beginners to advanced students six days per week during school terms. They also offer Yoga therapy, pregnancy and pre-conceptual care and under 16s classes and teacher training from Introductory, through Junior Intermediate and Senior levels. Members may also use the facilities for free practice sessions; - Richard and Kirsten hope this will encourage pupils to firmly establish a home self-practice - which is of course an essential part of Yoga.

The Centre also offers a programme of cultural activities centring around Yoga and India - talks on Yoga philosophy, Yoga film screenings, learning basic Sanskrit, yogic chanting, Yoga demonstrations etc. They have shown the beautiful award winning film 'Samadhi' featuring BKS Iyengar. In the New Year the programme will include learning together to chant the *Yoga Sutras* in Sanskrit. These events are free to members and all are welcome.

The Centre is often in use at weekends for special classes, workshops and courses,. Despite only being open a short time they have already hosted two courses by advanced Indian teachers Jawahar Bangera and Rajvi Mehta, Women's Health days led by Senior Australian teacher Karen Wilde and First Aid training for Yoga teachers, as well as special in-house intensives, retreats and Yoga days. More special events are planned with senior Iyengar teachers including and intensive weekend Annie Ciekanski from France/Pune and Ali Dashti from Pune/Switzerland. Their events draw people in from as far afield as London, Yorkshire and Ireland, Some students regularly travel from London and the far north of Scotland to attend teacher training at the centre.

'We are truly blessed to have found Iyengar Yoga and to have been taught by Guruji Iyengar and his senior pupils and now to be able to provide this centre, better to share Yoga with others. We feel very fortunate that we are able to be self-reliant and earn our living this way. Our Guruji says you should give more than you take and we hope this is what we do here. We hope and pray that we are able to share what we have learned with purity, sincerity and love and help people to experience the wonderful gift of the art, science and philosophy of Yoga.'



For further information, visit: www.bath-iyengar-Yoga.com and for details of upcoming workshops and special events. Bath Iyengar Yoga Centre is situated at Beehive Yard, Walcot Street, Bath BA1 5BT, Tel: 01225 319699