

The journey to yoga class.

For the past two and a half years, I have regularly attended Iyengar Yoga classes in Bangalore, the Silicon Valley of India. I practice under the guidance of Yogacharya Shri H.S.Arun, a long time student of “Guruji” BKS Iyengar.

The class is about seven kilometers away from my home. I travel by car, and am usually chauffeured. As anywhere in urban India, the route is noisy, polluted and ridden with chaos. Often, there are roadblocks due to repair/construction work, or there are little accidents between swaggering commuters or then, there may be slowdowns due to rain.

A journey which should take ten minutes usually takes anywhere up to a half-hour or more. And that’s a half-hour to and a half-hour fro, to attend a class of one hour and fifteen minutes. At least three times a week.

In the early days, that time would be spent in expending pent-up road rage. Whether I was driving or being driven, I would be instant judge and jury of every driver on the road. “Why can’t the idiot at least drive on the right side of the road?” Or – “If the city government cannot repair just this one road in more than six months, just forget about the rest of Bangalore!”

So on and on. All this punctuated with jabs of conversation on the cell phone, with frantic mental list-making of what I needed to get done after class, or over the next day. Add to

that pangs of guilt for leaving the kids at home for such an apparently non-productive mission.

By the time I arrived at Prashant Yogashraya, to climb the twenty-four steps needed to get to class, my sympathetic nervous system would be in extreme overdrive. Added to that, ironically, would be the excitement of practicing yoga again, since my body memory always recorded how good it had felt the previous time.

So, I would pant up the stairs at a sweat, often arriving just in time for the prayer, as the low vibrancy of the 'Pranava' (the chanting of the three 'Om's) gently undulated in the spacious hall, filled with cross-legged, closed-eyed students. Quickly, I'd grab a blanket, jerk into Swastikasana and join in the prayer.

Astonishingly though, in just a few minutes, with only two or three asanas of the day's sequence behind me, I would feel myself calming down, my mind settling, my body getting down to the business of "yoking itself" in yoga.

When I look back over the past two and a half years, the picture has become clearer. Somewhere in the process of the more than 800 commutes I have made to the yoga class, things had changed. Imperceptibly at first, but then, like an oncoming spring manifesting itself quite suddenly with a profusion of buds, my drives to yoga class became infused with huge promise.

Nowadays, the new me can roll up the windows and submerge my senses in Hindustani classical music (which I also happen to study). I can equally roll down the windows and, whiffing the polluted air, vibrate with the urgency of the hired autorickshaw in the next lane. I also seem to prepare for the oncoming class. Unconsciously I lift my spine, roll back my shoulders and bring in the subtle shift of body awareness that always precedes a good yoga session.

In a later analysis, I have found that, these days, I arrive at class, not just less breathless but also less in the 'nick of time'. Somehow, without my own self being quite aware of it, I have adjusted personal time-space in such a way that leaving the previous destination and arriving at yoga class has become better prioritized and more streamlined.

How and when did that happen? I happily and firmly believe that the transformation took seed in the yoga class itself.

The yoga class I had sandwiched between what I had done and what I was going to do has itself become an influencer of the two. Somewhere between Tadasana and Shavansana, a quietude establishes itself, reaching out to mind and body and spirit, spelling out a language that communicates with my internal drivers as much as my external ones.

Somehow then, the drive to class has become part of the yoga class itself. I still sing aloud with my classical gurus over the music system in the car. I still make occasional

eye contact with a commuter on a nearby bus. Yet, mostly, I withdraw to a quiet place inside myself, my head upright, my spine ready. Whether I am driving or being chauffeured, it is almost the same. I get a head start on the connectivity that all yoga students experience in the class.

And so, I remind my young yoga-student self, the journey can become the destination – one breath, one thought, one action at a time.

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