

ASHTANGA YOGA STORIES

Delights, Insights, Difficulties

This is not Instagram. This is a long look at Ashtanga yoga and the current discussion regarding it. I have attempted to write with love and clarity. In writing this piece, I have been inspired by guidance I received from a fellow practitioner: "be sure it is helpful and kind for others". Of course, no one is neutral. We each have our perspectives, our angles, our histories. Reading this will probably take as long as practising the Suryanamaskars and standing postures up to Prasarita Padottanasana.

All quotes used in this article have been checked and their use approved by the relevant person.

Falling in love

I love Ashtanga yoga. Its feelings of flow and fluidity. The profound powers that can arise from regular practising. That discipline of doing the same sequence. I began practising Ashtanga in 1994. My yoga teacher had spent the summer with Derek and Radha at the Practice Place in Crete. She came back inspired and enthused by this form. She was converted. A few weeks after she returned, she invited about a dozen of us over to her flat in east London to watch her practising Ashtanga. It was a graceful glide of focus, strength and flexibility. Guided by breath and steadied by the seeing of *drishti*, it was an impressive performance. I too became a convert.

Gradually, my body opened. Gradually, I began to understand the system. Slowly, it began to make some sort of sense. In autumn 1999, I started self-practice with Mysore authorised teachers at Ashtanga Yoga London. Two years later – October 2001 – I began teaching Ashtanga yoga. Since then, I have taught more than 5000 Ashtanga classes. Nearly all have been talk-through, although I did teach a weekly self-practice session for seven years.

Ashtanga yoga has been a good friend to me. I appreciate this relationship and all that I have learnt from it. Like all relationships, there have been ups and downs. Bumps and bruises. Unlike many other practitioners, I never went to the spiritual home of Ashtanga yoga in Mysore. I never called K Pattabhi Jois (KPJ) '*guruji*' – although I did practice with him when he taught in London.

Other versions of Ashtanga yoga have been and are still being taught in Mysore. What I am focusing on in this article is the KPJ-style of Ashtanga yoga. When I refer to 'Ashtanga yoga', this means the version taught by KPJ.

My Ashtanga practise has evolved and changed over the years. In 2011, I wrote *The Box: being inside looking outside* which was an attempt to critically examine the Ashtanga practice. From a striving and a struggle, my practise has become softer. From relative restrictions, I have become more open and stronger. From a place of pushing, my practice has become more a journey and an exploring. From a view of yoga as just physical postures, I have come to realise that yoga can be a practice of self-transformation, where the qualities of insight and kindness are crucial.

These days, I do not practise Ashtanga as much as I used to. I no longer do *vinyasas* between the sides of the sitting postures. I have retired from doing *Chakrasana* (that backward somersault). My practice these days is more a balance of yin with the Ashtanga yang, more about meditation and slower yoga. Life at 55.

Nothing fixed

Nothing is fixed. Everything is changing. This is as true of Ashtanga yoga as of all other phenomena. Within Ashtanga yoga, there are different strands and threads. Ways of teaching and ways of

practising. Dissidents and debates. Solidifying of dogmatic silos. Searching for other possibilities within and beyond the system. Very few people in these stories are ‘bad’. Some might have been misinformed. All of us make mistakes. Very many are genuine practitioners seeking to shift and to transform. These paths of change – investigation, enquiry and waking up – can be long and arduous. Plenty of potholes. Peaks and troughs.

Discussions have occurred over the years about the culture of strong physical adjustments within Ashtanga. A recent element in these discussions is the #MeToo movement in yoga. An increasing number of allegations about ‘inappropriate touching’ of women have been made against KPJ. This has caused a firestorm within the Ashtanga community. Divisions, denials, claims of silencing and claims of collusion. Brave women have raised their voices. Breaking silence and shame around speaking up. These courageous individuals have faced a variety of responses. Praise, criticism, applause, vehement opposition. How could the guru – KPJ – do such things?

In examining the discussion of this in the Ashtanga community, it is vital to remember that we all live in glass houses. We are all human. Fallible creatures. Easily deluded. Driven by deep desires and patterns constructed in early years. Stuck in situations because of personal circumstances. Like so many others, I too have made multitudes of mistakes in my life. This does not diminish the lives changed nor the harm done through encounters with KPJ Ashtanga yoga. Rather, entering into this discussion with these acknowledgments can allow us to recognise and take responsibility for errors and harm caused, rejoice in growth and move forward as a practice community advocating transformation within and around.

Different stories

As part of writing this article, I have encountered a breadth of stories, voices and perceptions with more than thirty practitioners. These have been mainly in writing, with a few discussions verbally. Sincere and dedicated and thoughtful practitioners. All have practiced for more than five years. Many much longer: ten or twenty or thirty years. Nearly all are teachers. Some are clear that they did not see anything untoward in the practice, the system or the guru, KPJ. He was a profound and incredibly influential teacher. For some people, their experience of practising with KPJ in Mysore was joyful, beneficial and positive.

A teacher who practiced with KPJ in Mysore many times wrote: “I never saw or witnessed or heard about KPJ groping people.” Someone else, who is fairly critical of the guru system, wrote: “I did practice with KPJ both in Mysore and London; I did not see anything untoward nor did I hear any rumours at the time.”

A female teacher wrote: “In the seven times I studied with KPJ in London and Mysore, he never touched me inappropriately ever. There was no sexual vibe. Perhaps I was too old. He didn’t find me attractive. He knew I’d turn into Kali. Who knows?” Books have been written about what a wonderful teacher KPJ was – like *Guruji*, edited by Guy Donahaye and Eddie Stern, and Kino McGregor’s *Sacred Fire: My Journey into Ashtanga Yoga*. Neither of these books mention inappropriate touching. Or too strong adjustments. Or abuses of power.

Other practitioners, other experiences. A long-term Ashtanga practitioner wrote: “KPJ touched female students inappropriately and he touched men and women differently.” A woman who first practiced in Mysore in 1999 wrote about KPJ’s adjustments: “I too was seriously abused by KPJ.... I remember crying when I knew he was coming to adjust me. I’m ashamed I didn’t say anything then.” A woman who has been practising in different styles for 25 years reported: “KPJ adjusted my *Uttanasana* [standing forward bend] by grabbing my crotch and lifting it up and I quietly demurred that it was an appropriate adjustment and proof, ironically, of his commitment to the path vs socially

appropriate behaviour.” In the words of an authorised teacher*: “In conversation, I have more friends tell me their first ever adjustment by KPJ was a squash on their genitals.”

Another reported the experience of her friend: “KPJ stuck his fingers through her leggings and into her cunt” and then wrote about herself: “I remember in Mysore, KPJ lying on me and it being very intimate and thinking this is weird.” From a senior woman teacher: “I personally allowed KPJ to touch me inappropriately. After drop backs, he gave full frontal contact, standing face to face, with him pulling my hips to his hips. Then he rhythmically pressed his genitals on my back in *Paschimottanasana* [seated forward bend].”

Leela Miller, who has been teaching yoga since 1986, reported: “I was told over 25 years ago not to go to Mysore because I’d get groped or injured or both.” In the words of Karen Rain, one of the first women to speak out: “Pattabhi Jois sexually assaulted and abused women.”

Pluralities

Many aspects. Pluralities of identity. It is clear that KPJ was a highly experienced yoga master, a Sanskrit scholar, a Brahmin householder. And for some women, he was also an opportunistic predator who abused the trust placed in him by his students. Even so, what is still sometimes being said is that KPJ ‘inappropriately touched’ – when in fact this contact was violating, invasive and abusive. I have yet to hear a male Ashtanga practitioner say that KPJ fondled their testicles and pulled on their penis. If he had done that, I doubt if this would be called ‘inappropriate touching’.

KPJ did the equivalent and worse to a number of women over time. As publicly attested by the nine named women whose accounts appeared in Matthew Remski’s April 2018 article in *The Walrus* as well as reports by an additional five practitioners in this article, KPJ abused and assaulted women who studied with him. It is highly disrespectful and extremely arrogant to call this discussion a ‘witch hunt’. The number of individuals involved is not at issue. The level of abuse involved is not at issue (digital penetration is a criminal offense in a number of national jurisdictions). One case of abuse is one case too many.

Why was this allowed to happen? What leads so many of us practitioners to give up so much of our power? Why do we keep quiet even when there is a knowing that actions are not ethical? Significant questions. No easy answers. No short cuts. Part of the process can be engaging in discussion and an understanding of context from which such acts arose.

The postures more than the practitioner...

Devotion easily can become dogmatism. The placing of people on pedestals can be a recipe for disaster. Inspiration and deference are a potent mix that can be open to abuse. There are numerous illustrations in yoga and elsewhere of the perils of the guru system. Authoritarianism can flow from the guru structure – and this is embedded within the KPJ version of the Ashtanga system.

Ashtanga yoga is known for strong physical adjustments and for following a specified pattern of postures. Of course, recalling the dissidents and those debates, this is not always true. Some prefer to have an approach where the assisting is “from the inside out rather than the outside in”. But some of the KPJ Ashtanga approved adjustments can at times be hard and, occasionally, heavy handed.

The KPJ model sets the postural sequence into stone, with limited regard for individuality or uniqueness of body. The strictness of this version of Ashtanga yoga can result in poses being imposed upon person, with the flexible often being preferred to those with more ‘average’

* Authorisation was awarded originally by KPJ and now by his grandson, Sharath Jois, on the basis of: 1) regularly attending the KPJ Mysore studio and 2) postural proficiency. It is *not* necessarily based on a detailed assessment of teaching abilities.

physicalities. A revering of these exceptionalists and an assuming that everyone else could do the poses – if only they practiced more. Postures dominate practitioner. In my opinion, this is a mistaken view. In my opinion, someone can be highly physically flexible and not particularly healthy – or kind or insightful.

Some people have undoubtedly been injured by adjustments. Some people have undoubtedly been damaged by the strictness of this system. This KPJ Ashtanga yoga model – with its emphasis on practitioners fitting their body to postures, with its hierarchy of poses that fuels striving, with its authoritarianism of the guru and disciples – has definitely broken some people.

A man told me that being adjusted in *Supta Kurmasana* (seated deep forward bend) reminded him of being sexually assaulted as a teenager. Not a pleasant memory. There is this common adjustment of the pushing by teachers of hands towards ground in *Prasarita Padottanasana C* (standing wide legged forward bend). In terms of body biomechanics, this could be regarded as a potentially injurious adjustment. Practitioners having to accomplish (whatever that means) poses before being ‘awarded’ subsequent postures.

Within this model, the emphasis is often on what practitioners *cannot* do rather than what they *can* do. People get stuck – with the intricate challenges of *Marichyasana D* (seated twist) or *Supta Kurmasana*, with the very deep back bending required for drop backs into *Urdhva Dhanurasana*. This rigorous postural hierarchy means some practitioners stay where they are in the sequence for a long time. One practitioner commented: “I see long-term students stuck in [the] primary [series] who could benefit with intermediate series backbends, and on the other hand I see floppy practitioners dangerously ploughing through [the] third [series]; I see injuries waiting to happen.”

The struggling and the striving can create conditions where enquiry and examination are restricted rather than encouraged. Where it does all become about the postures. The doing rather than being. Personally, I pushed to succeed, to climb that posture ladder. I can still remember staggering away from practice, having sacrificed my knees for the glory of the pose just so that I could get further into the second series. Being awarded *Bakasana* (an arm balance) did not change my life.

Rachel Barlow wrote: “I had a third series practice until late 2016. My body broke. I broke. I couldn’t do it anymore or at least I couldn’t do it until I had sorted out the injuries and pain that I was experiencing... I decided that I didn’t want hip replacements when I’m 60... my practice has evolved quite considerably. Anyone that says that Ashtanga yoga is all you need is bullshitting themselves. A statement like that has always left me wanting to challenge that. There are many paths and there are many perspectives.”

It is the teacher’s responsibility to discourage the striving that is too strong. To encourage dialogue. To emphasise that it is good to say ‘no’ to adjustments, to say ‘stop’, to say ‘not today’, to say ‘that is too much’. It is the student’s responsibility to stand as best as they can in their power and to be as attentive as they can to their personal potential. One person wrote: “Regarding bad adjustments and injuries...there is a general acceptance that these people [teachers] are experts, whereas in fact they could easily be very poor teachers with limited training and no compassion.”

In the past, I myself have done too strong adjustments. I have injured people. I apologise to those who have been injured by my adjustments. And I have been injured when being adjusted. I have stayed silent even though I have felt adjustments on me have been too strong. Now I do not. Now I do not adjust postures such as *Prasarita C*. Now I am more at ease with practitioners being themselves rather than forcing them to ‘achieve’ a pose.

Rather than freeing...

The repetitiveness of doing poses in the same way over and over again can result in difficulties: physical, emotional and psychological. Rather than freeing, there can arise inflexibility.

Michael Kazamias, an authorised teacher, wrote: “I left Ashtanga yoga after I had three bulging discs and could barely walk anymore. I realised that, to my teachers, the ‘correct’ method would always be more important than my well-being... ‘You do as your guru tells you’, my teacher once said in conference. In retrospect, it was the worst piece of advice ever given; it led to years of abusing and letting my teachers abuse my body in the name of Ashtanga yoga.” He resigned the authorisation in 2015.

An insightful question for all of us in terms of asana could be: “Why I am trying to make it harder and more challenging?” Because the consequences of this and that “you do as your guru tells you” can be significant. Many injuries and many broken bodies. Many people hurting themselves and hurting others. For Sarai Harvey-Smith (another authorised teacher): “The way I was practicing second and third series made me quite ill. I over-stimulated my adrenals and developed an underactive thyroid... Of course there is no definitive proof that it was the yoga, but I have thought about it a lot and investigated it through different routes and I think it probably was the yoga.”

This hardness and obedience feeds into an authoritarian structure where senior teachers – local ‘representatives’ of the guru – police the practice. In 2016, a senior teacher said to someone who had been teaching Ashtanga since the late 1990s: “Do you think you know better than the guru? If you are not going to teach it properly by the rules, you should stop teaching Ashtanga.” This rigidity plays a part in the collusion by some senior teachers with what KPJ was doing in Mysore. The guru could not be wrong – despite evidence. The guru could not be challenged – because the guru knows best. One teacher wrote: “After spending two months in Mysore in 2004, when I came back to the UK I went to my teacher with concerns about the way KPJ touched me and other women and (like most people in Mysore) he brushed it off and didn’t take it seriously.”

Heads down

The widespread preference for many was – and still is for some people – to keep their heads down and avoid rocking the boat. Hoping that it will all be ok. That the storm will blow over. That things can continue as they used to. Eyes turned away. Perhaps too willing to be dazzled by the guru sunshine into submission. There can be countless reasons for this: wanting to stay part of a group; a belief in the effectiveness of the system; the fact that individuals have made substantial personal and financial investments in the system. One person wrote: “I wanted to be part of the Ashtanga community and guru worship was such a central part of the whole thing – I wanted to believe – I was an idiot!” A multitude of factors. Just as each of us is a multitude of circumstances and causes.

Perhaps it became easier to keep going rather than to pause, to keep going rather than allow space for questioning, to keep going rather than to notice in the words of one long-term teacher that this system sometimes: “perpetuates a rigid, stagnant and unsophisticated way of teaching”. From another teacher: “exclusion and exclusivity seems to be over-riding the very essence of what yoga really is.”

Much of a 2018 document from Sharath Jois on code of conduct was about sanctity of practice and allegiance to lineage. Not acknowledging and respectfully hearing voices of those who have been hurt. Nothing about prioritising the victims of KPJ’s abuse. A senior teacher recently said “the magic of Mysore has gone”. But Mysore was not magical for those abused and injured. Statements like “the magic has gone” maintain the Mysore myth-making and help to undermine those damaged by their times practising with KPJ. Another example of history being rewritten and differing voices marginalised.

One teacher talked about feeling required to follow the Mysore rules. A good question is: why? This may be an example of the guru ruling by control, with the teacher being worried about losing their authorisation status and thus perhaps diminishing their income.

We as practitioners are frequently looking for approval. For the authority – that parent, the guru – to see us, to recognise us, to congratulate us. Readily do we give up our power because of past wounds, searching for solutions to deep discomforts. Sometimes these searches have meant that we kept quiet when we could have – or should have – spoken up. I remember being shown photographs in 2001 of KPJ adjusting practitioners in an extremely intimate and strong way. I remember a woman practitioner telling me in around 2003 that after coming back from practising with KPJ in Mysore, all she was able to do was Child’s Pose for about six months. I did not ask her why. When I was writing *The Box* back in 2011, someone suggested that I could be more critical of KPJ and the authoritarian guru system. I refused. In retrospect, they were right and I was wrong.

Rigorous intensity

Within the rigorous intensity of Ashtanga yoga – the request for daily practice, the regular early mornings, the physical demands of practising such a strong sequence – there can be a lot of exhaustion. This could feed defensiveness and discouragement of debate. In one Ashtanga teacher’s view: “Ashtangis would all be much nicer people if we did restorative half of the time.”

The fire of striving that characterises a lot of Ashtanga yoga is partly caused by practitioners having to follow this strict postural sequence. Here poses are placed on platforms, becoming altars that we are supposed to venerate. These fires can burn bright. As a practitioner wrote: “In my opinion that explains some of the friction, arguing, possessiveness and tyranny [among Ashtanga practitioners].” Cooling practices like slower yoga, meditation, walks in nature could possibly help to soften some of these intensities. To help become more balanced.

One common piece of advice from KPJ was: “No books. Only one teacher you take.” The sectarianism that actively discourages other practices and postural possibilities creates circumstances that mean a practice of flexibility can in fact be quite rigid. This approach still continues, with one senior teacher’s current advice being: “Try not to get sucked into discussions and opinions.” Just keep doing the practice...

Ashtanga yoga can be such an amazing practice for healing and health – yet within the KPJ model, there is dependence on rules and restricting of evolutionary organic growth. While it is true that playing ‘safe’ can stunt growth, in the physical vocabulary of Ashtanga yoga, this exploring of ‘limits’ is often quite limited. Other dialects are overlooked. Advancement is often predominantly defined by postural abilities. Could the exploring be defined in more ways than lumbar extension or hip rotation? Expressing emotional vulnerabilities? Examining the engines that drive our practising? Evaluating how it feels to be still, to be soft, to slow down?

Like dandelions...

One teacher says that he teaches ‘traditional yoga’. That means – for him at least – questions are not allowed. My preference is much more about open source practising. More horizontal and less vertical. Like dandelions – an evolving through shared root systems. Less hero worship and more humanisation – that we are all flawed beings trying to do our best.

Greg Nardi, who runs an Ashtanga studio in Florida, wrote: “Many dogmas surrounding yoga pedagogy need to be revised, including the belief in methods and gurus as infallible and the subsequent emphasis on submission rather than intuition and reasoning.” Scott Johnson, who runs an Ashtanga studio in London, wrote that his centre “offers a wider, more open view of the practice, meeting people where they are, not what is required of them”.

Of course, practising changes over time. It must change over time to be sustaining and sustainable. Likewise our teaching. As I know well, many teachers like to be the centre of attention. As I know

well, many students want to be seen and loved. These are challenging and complex circumstances that can be a recipe for abuse and ego boosting.

We can choose. Either authoritarian gurus, obedience, silencing. Or open dialogue, listening, sincerity. Too much of the time we bow down to authority. Too much of the time we are handing over our power. The novelist Ben Okri wrote: “Nations and peoples are largely the stories they feed themselves. If they tell themselves stories that are lies, they will suffer the future consequences of those lies. If they tell themselves stories that face their own truths, they will free their histories for future flowerings.”

Sharp striking

The revelations of KPJ’s abuse are the sharp striking of a bell – again. A reminder to all of us about the dangers of certainty and the pitfalls of power. A question: how do we manage charisma? How can a charismatic teacher be inspirational and influencing without falling into the trap of becoming fixated on their imagery? Not getting drunk on the drug of devotion. Branding – of self and of style – can cause great pressures. Expectations easily being traps. Projections becoming prisons. Adoration being addictive.

This is a request that we make sure that we are grounding ourselves. We need to think carefully and listen deeply. To avoid the extremes of immediate reactivity (easily enabled by social media) and complete ignoring (easily enabled by guru worship). That we reflect upon our practising with ourselves, our teachers, our communities. Consciously softening our own expectations and other people’s expectations. Consciously taking people off pedestals. That we focus on sustainability. That the talk is walked as best as we humanly can.

Perhaps these revelations and this upheaval can play a part in rebuilding yoga as shapes of circles rather than hierarchical pyramids. Where honesty and dialogue are more appreciated than regimentation and rules. Over my time of teaching and practising, I have received very useful feedback. Sometimes it has been distressing: “you injured my hamstring when adjusting me”. Sometimes it has been insightful: “you talk too much”. Sometimes it has been positive: “you are an excellent teacher”. Sometimes it has been amusing: “you are too political”. We all can learn a lot from such feedback and peer group guidance.

Being conscious of power dynamics is important. Having checks and balances on authority is essential in order to avoid that corrupting of power. Owning faults clearly and openly is a crucial part of learning. Karen Rain wrote: “If anyone went to Mysore on account of me and was hurt in anyway, I am so sorry. I also offer my apologies if anyone was hurt by my adjustments.” For Melanie Cooper, who has been teaching Ashtanga self-practice since 2002: “I feel very foolish now that I allowed that to happen to me and I am very sorry if I encouraged anyone to go there and [consequently] be abused.”

By contrast, the defensiveness from people at the top of the Mysore pyramid is a sign of rigidity. To date (8 May 2018), Sharath Jois has not apologised for KPJ’s abuse, despite requests. Some senior teachers who have been policing the practice have not apologised for this controlling behaviour. Nor have they apologised for their encouragement of students to practice with KPJ, even though they had heard evidence of KPJ’s abuse.

Wonderful practice, wonderful lessons

Ashtanga yoga is potentially a wonderful practice. One teacher wrote: “it is life affirming and a highly useful way of deepening your connection to yourself.” Another said: “Ashtanga can be a beautiful practice with some extraordinary people involved.” For another: “I do believe it can be a rewarding and beautiful experience practicing Ashtanga, if done safely and mindfully.”

Ashtanga yoga can be for nearly every body. A practice that is accessible and sensitive. But transparency about what has happened and what is happening is required. Maybe this might be a process of truth and reconciliation. Maybe these discussions can help us move from a naïve idealism to an idealism grounded more in clarity and maturity. Because circling the wagons is not a sustainable strategy. Because shooting the messenger will not make the stories go away. Because calling a person investigating KPJ's abuse 'a troublemaker' is like putting our head in a bucket of mud.

One teacher wrote: "Not one system is perfect. Not one system is complete and there is much learning to be had from diversity, flexibility and learning and working with many different types of people." Can we take a step back to see bigger pictures? Do we tighten and harden or unpack and loosen? Do we close or do we open?

People have deeply dedicated themselves over decades to Ashtanga yoga. Many people, including myself, have greatly benefitted from practising this form of yoga. Feelings are conflicted and confused about the current challenges within Ashtanga yoga. These circumstances are demanding, testing and upsetting. Lessons that can be learnt include clear boundaries and not putting people on pedestals. Maybe this is a warning about the problem of empire and the fixation on label. Rather than closing ranks, perhaps this is an opportunity to reform Ashtanga yoga and explore growing edges. Here are twelve suggested points for encouraging this process.

Twelve Practical Points

1. Imagery associated with KPJ is removed from Ashtanga studios. As Karen Rain wrote: "I don't see venerating P Jois as a necessary component of practising Ashtanga yoga". Karen Rain has subsequently said: "Stop referring to him as 'Guruji' or using the title 'Sri'".
2. Senior teachers take the lead in acknowledging what has happened by unambiguous apologising. Non-nuanced. It could be one way of evolving.
3. That the women who were assaulted by KPJ receive compensation payments from the KPJAYI that is currently led by Sharath Jois.
4. Yoga teachers seek support through mentoring and supervision.
5. Ethical codes are clear and widely publicised – amongst students (so that they know what is acceptable teacher behaviour and what is unacceptable) as well as amongst teachers.
6. Consent cards are used. For example, use a pack of playing cards: number up meaning that the person does not want any adjustments or advice in today's practice. If a student has a structurally unsafe practice, then the teacher has a responsibility to communicate that to the student.
7. Channels of communication are available, such as anonymous feedback forms, as part of the process of empowering and informing students.
8. Other paths of practise are encouraged as a means of diminishing boundaries.
9. Encouragement of options and use of props.
10. Understanding of individuality and the fact of "our unique biology and our unique biography".
11. Rules are more about guidance than rigid statements carved into stone.
12. Encouraging teachers to request help when they lack knowledge about specific areas.

With thanks to the following for their advice and suggestions. This does not mean that they agree with what I have written but they have approved the listing of their name here. This article is my views and my opinions. And of course these views and opinions will change. April Nunes Tucker, Clare Wener, Emma Catto, Heather Elton, Inna Costantini, Jess Glenny, Joey Miles, Karen Rain, Leela Miller, Maitripushpa Bois, Matthew Remski, Melanie Cooper, Michael Kazamias, Michaela Clarke, Rachel Barlow, Robin Catto, Sarai Harvey-Smith, Scott Johnson, Theo Wildcroft, Will Lavin.

Further Resources

This is an article by Matthew Remski on KPJ – “documents decades of allegations of sexual abuse against Ashtanga Yoga founder Pattabhi Jois”:

<https://thewalrus.ca/yogas-culture-of-sexual-abuse-nine-women-tell-their-stories/>

This is an article by Michelle Ryan who practices and teaches Ashtanga yoga:

<https://www.ashtangayoganorthampton.com/blog/panic-and-emptiness>

This is an article about ‘post-lineage’ yoga by Theo Wildcroft – “Post-lineage does not mean anti-lineage... It just shifts the authority for deciding good yoga practice away from the absolute power of previous masters, to small community groups of teachers”:

<https://www.wildyoga.co.uk/2018/04/post-lineage-yoga/>

This is an article by Sarai Harvey-Smith – “I apologise to the victims for being part of a culture that enabled this to happen, having studied with Pattabhi Jois in Mysore annually from 2003 until his death in 2009”:

<https://saraiyoga.wordpress.com>

This is an article by Scott Johnson – “We need to listen more than ever. And we need to be uncomfortable”:

<https://www.stillpointyogalondon.com/listen-without-prejudice/>

About Me

I have been practising yoga for 25 years and I still get grumpy. I have been teaching yoga for 17 years and I still make mistakes. I was recently reminded by one of my teachers about “the imperfect art of teaching”.

I teach workshops, courses and retreats. Details on my website: <http://www.yogawithnorman.co.uk>

In 2016 I bought out a book – *Brightening Our Inner Skies: yin and yoga* – available [here](#). I have written articles on yoga practising and transformation – available on my [website](#). I have a monthly newsletter – if you would like to receive it, please email me: yogawithnorman@gmail.com.

Please feel free to email me with comments and feedback. I am grateful for all the help I have received over the years. For all the times the air has gently – and, on occasion, not so gently – been let out of my balloon by others. Keeping me grounded. Keeping me connected. Encouraging my eyes to be open. A continual clarifying of my views, my practises, my opinions.

Norman Blair

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