

# Exchange of Learning Day (ELD) 25/26

## “Yoga For All Bodies”

Invocation to Patanjali

Morning Session Introduction (10 mins)

EL leader introduces the theme ‘Yoga For All Bodies’, and the learning objective and aims of the day.

### Learning Objective

To explore practical approaches, and reflexive thought processes, that develop Iyengar yoga classrooms, practice environments and communities, to be diverse, body positive and inclusive.

### Aims

1. To experience how adaptations are a key to ‘yoga for all bodies’. Adaptations are an important part of Iyengar yoga not only for those who encounter difficulties. Every pose involves a process of exploring different actions of the body, to bring about the benefits of that pose, whether in classical or modified form. E.g most of us adapt Sarvangasana by using a platform if we want to practice it for extended time periods for health benefits to the nervous system.

2. To develop awareness as a yoga community, of how exclusion of ‘different bodies’ can happen, and the effects of discrimination on the health and life chances of self and

others. We will consider the effects of stereotypical generalisations about body types, how we *think* about, *exclude* and *include* other people's bodies. During the day, and as part of ongoing self study, and education we explore some of the effects of unconscious and conscious biases on behaviour, language around 'difference', and in teaching 'different' bodies, as we nurture collective knowledge of what we can do to develop *inclusion*.

3. To develop collectively, growing our teaching environment and community by welcoming 'difference', we embed the yogic principle of Ahimsa: cultivating non-violence and compassion in thoughts, words and deeds towards all living things.

Total Running Time for the Day: 5 hours +lunch break  
(Morning session 3hrs. Afternoon session 2 hrs)

## Part 1: Group Practice (40 mins)

EL leader gives a theme for the group practice and explains how it works (RIMYI Guidelines 2020). As we practice side by side we cultivate friendliness, support mutual learning, inclusion, and community building. Suggested themes: *hips and groins, twisting, forward extension, shoulders and backward extension.*

## Part 2: Target Asanas and Sequencing (20 mins)

EL Leader teaches one 'target asana', in keeping with the practice theme. Showing the preparatory actions for that pose; how to experience the directionality in movement; and possible linking actions between the target asana and 2 or more asanas to form a sequence.

EL Leader gives a selection of other 'target asanas', within their practice theme. Suggestions as follows: (30 mins)

*Hips and groins:* Trikonasana, Baddha Konasana, Malasana, Supta Virasana,

*Twisting:* Parivrtta Trikonasana, Parivrtta Parsvakonasana, Bharadvajasana 1 and 11,

*Forward Extension:* Parsvottanasana, Uttanasana, Janu Sirsasana,

*Shoulders and Backward extension:* Virabhadrasana 1, Ustrasana, Urdhva Dhanurasana.

Each participant chooses 1 'target asana' from the list given (within the practice theme). Then joins with another person

in pairs, or small groups to practice with others who would like to work on that same asana. The object is to find the threads and links, building a small sequence that could lead in or out of their 'target asana'.

## Part 2: Sharing (30 mins)

Each of the small groups or pairs present their experience with the whole group, sharing how they approached their given 'target asana' and built their small sequence.

## Part 3: Different bodies approach the pose differently Short discussion (20 mins)

Consider common challenges found in teaching on this practice theme: e.g. catching in twists, instability in the standing parivritta's, how stiff groins and hips effect seated poses, etc, then consider how alternative methods can create a more level playing field.

Break into pairs and work on one of the other asanas in the group of target poses given (within the practice theme). Find two or three teaching methods that would help the stability or direction in that pose, to include all bodies. Noting that methods and adaptations can be taught to the whole class group so that everyone can benefit.

## Part 4: Same asana different body= diverse approach (30 mins)

EL leader teaches 1 - 3 poses of their choice (within the practice theme) with and without props, to show how to teach individuals with diverse needs in the same class.

Suggestions of poses that could be included:

*Twisting:* Parivrtta Paschimottanasana, Ardha Matsyendrasana, Parivrtta Janu Sirsasana.

*Hips and groins:* Uphavistha Konasana, Parsva Upavistha Konasana, Padmasana, Anantasana

*Forward extension:* Kurmasana, Paschimottanasana, Skandasana, Ardha Baddha Padmottanasana

*Shoulders and Backward extension:* Purvottanasana, Matsyasana, Dwi Pada Viparita Dandasana, Raja Kapotasana.

Themes could include:

Learning how different bodies approach the same asana in different ways with(out) props.

How to help a student feel a beneficial action such as stability, direction or extension.

How props can be used when hands-on adjustments are not appropriate.

When a prop could make a student feel dependant on 'help', or obstruct their understanding – 'I can only do with a brick'.

For beginners: whether or not to use props initially, before trying the pose first?

Adjusting for students who find verbal instruction difficult to follow.

When to give adapted asana or props to individuals or to the whole group.

What factors might influence a teacher's attention towards different students.

E.g. an experienced student, a trainee, a beginner, or a person with health needs, and the decision to use verbal, props or hands on adjustment.

Break for Lunch: 45mins – 1hr

## Part 5: Unconscious Bias awareness in yoga teaching (45 mins divided into 4 sections)

EL Day 2025 – 2026 Background Reading and Education

*In Part 7 we include a few online resources, to support self-education on unconscious bias awareness. There is so much out there and a little preparation will help everyone join in and get more from the EL day (See Part 7).*

Language and Instruction (5 mins)

EL leader to introduce the importance of clear instructions informed by understanding and observation of students at different stages of learning, giving a couple of examples of how instructions can be mis-understood when used in the wrong context. E.g 'levelise', 'tailbone in', 'soft abdomen'

Discussion in groups of three (10 mins).

Consider the effects of stereotypical generalisations about body types, how we *think* about and *include* other people's bodies. This makes a big difference to how we 'describe' different bodies doing asana. E.g. we might see 'stiffness' as a problem: 'stiff' is bad, 'flexible' is good. Or if a chair or prop doesn't 'fit', our language might suggest that the person's body size or shape is the 'mistake' or 'problem'. If a particular person's body is seen negatively, unconscious stereotyping could be at work. We know that some students suffer exclusion when they start yoga, so give up. Consider the impact of external 'images of success' in yoga.

## In Pairs(20 mins)

Discuss the effects of unconscious bias on the student learning experience. Choose 1 or 2 of the following

1. Consider the role of 'teacher attention' in the distribution, quality, and approach to student learning. E.g
  - a teacher's body language can be influenced by unconscious bias, affecting their attention patterns. E.g. a attention could be drawn towards, or away from a person whose body is different, or more positive attention given to a student more physically like them.
  - A particular student might be chosen for the purposes of demonstration (positive or negative), or too much attention given to one, and another less.
  - they might habitually look or walk to one side of the room first, unconsciously giving more attention to the left.
2. Consider how bias affects us before a person enters a yoga class. Even in what we perceive are informed decisions, bias has influence on a teacher's actions. How do we distinguish between choices based on our discretion / reflection and experience, versus those based on biases?
3. Consider how the teacher can influence the thoughts and attitudes of the rest of the group towards individuals.

## Group Discussion (10mins)

Strategies for awareness of unconscious bias in teaching

## Quiet reflection time (10 mins)

## Part 6: Sarvangasana (50 mins – 1 hour)

EL leader introduction to Sarvangasana. Most of us adapt Sarvangasana by using a platform if we want to practice it for extended time periods for health benefits to the nervous system.

1. Everyone to discuss the importance of Sarvangasana.
2. Emphasise the effects of different versions and the need for modifications.

Everyone practises Sarvangasana paying attention to the sequence of practice leading to Sarvangasana.

Alternatives to be considered where students are unable to do inversions.

Show different setup options, including:

- Broad shoulder set up
- Increased platform height (large breasts, neck problems) Possibilities: Stepped blankets, 2 bolsters.
- Walk up the wall or feet on the chair to help if there is difficulty lifting hips.
- Chair Sarvangasana

### Group Discussion

Observations, and the importance of Sarvangasana / and alternatives

## Part 7: Background Reading and Education

*Below are a selection of online education resources that could be helpful. There is a huge amount of information out there and we encourage exploring on one's own terms.*

*Getting Started: (To access these links, cut and paste into your search engine*

- *Take 1 or more of the Harvard Implicit Association Tests. Topics include: gender, race, disability, sexuality, skin-tone, weight, transgender, age, religion and other*  
<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>
- *Watch this TED Talk on Bias: Sussex University*  
<https://www.sussex.ac.uk/education/cheer/researchprojects/rise/trainingmodule/toolkit/bias>
- *Visit IYNAUS: Yoga and Equity Resources*  
<https://iynaus.org/yoga-equity-training-2/>

Coming Soon in 2026!

Equality, diversity and inclusion training seminar for all IY(UK) members, to support this years EL Programme

### *Other Online Education Resources*

1. Video – TED talk on Racism and Unconscious Bias

<https://www.ted.com/talks/emero neil racism and unconscious bias dont put me in a box>

2. Video – TED talk. Anti-ableism: it takes a TEAM. Helene Robinson

<https://www.ted.com/talks/helene robinson anti ableism it takes a team/transcript>

3. Podcast – Dolly Chugh

The Person you mean to be: How Good People Fight Bias

<https://behavioralgrooves.com/episode/how-good-people-fight-bias-chugh/>

4. IY(UK) IYN Article - Convention April 2021 Equity For Equality  
[https://issuu.com/iyengaryogauk/docs/iyn39\\_digital\\_singlepages](https://issuu.com/iyengaryogauk/docs/iyn39_digital_singlepages)
5. Yoga International Article - A yoga perspective on dismantling race  
<https://yogainternational.com/article/view/beyond-the-binary-a-yogic-perspective-on-dismantling-racism/?srsltid=AfmBOoqbXLAw00fVsvPBwbihNxjJSXHA-QbQqTXgd-JZIE9FxlOxHMva>
6. Article - British Wheel of Yoga: Embracing Every Body  
<https://www.bwy.org.uk/content/uploads/2024/10/Yoga-Magazine-November-2024.pdf>
7. Article - What the Worlds Best Orchestras Can Teach us about Gender Discrimination  
<http://curt-rice.com/2013/10/01/what-the-worlds-best-orchestras-can-teach-us-about-gender-discrimination/>
8. Article - Dance Magazine. My Experience as a Black Ballerina in a world of Implicit Bias  
<https://dancemagazine.com/my-experience-as-a-black-ballerina-in-a-world-of-implicit-bias/ - gsc.tab=0>
9. Research Paper – Exeter University. Frequency and mental health consequences of microaggressions experienced in the day-to-day lives of transgender and gender diverse people  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/26895269.2024.2380906>
10. The Royal Society Briefing: Scotland Unconscious Bias  
<https://royalsociety.org/~media/policy/Publications/2015/unconscious-bias-briefing-2015.pdf>
11. Journal Article - The importance of disability representation to address implicit bias in the workplace  
<https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/rehabilitation-sciences/articles/10.3389/fresc.2023.1048432/full>  
<https://news.exeter.ac.uk/research/big-firms-failing-unconscious-bias-disabled-people/>