



April 2023 to Associations:

When we all met in December 2019 to begin a shift in the way assessments are conducted worldwide, there was a lot of discussion and healthy debate on the ways to transition. We took your feedback and introduced the guide with the intention that the shift to the new assessment process as well as other issues that were tabled, such as the phase out of TTCs will take no more than two years.

However, Covid struck. It affected everyone at such a visceral level, communities were disrupted, lives were lost, an online system that we had never tried before came into practice. Throughout this, while RIMYI supported the transition to the new assessment process in different geographies, a lot of flexibility was granted. We did not demand the rigorous transition that we had agreed to in 2019.

Now that the world is back to regular functioning, we believe that we can go back to a faster pace of transition as envisioned in 2019. However, before any further communication is sent in that regard, we wanted to take stock and understand where each of you are with respect to transition. Also, I would like to bring your attention once again to the debate around TTC and mentorship.

Please read below once again the extract from page 45 in the Certification and Assessment Guidelines that was shared with you in July 2020:

Teachers, Mentors and TTCs

There is a deep-rooted myth that, “A teacher is made.” Extrapolation of this, states, “Any student can be trained to become a teacher.” Is it true?

Response to this question can be diverse, ranging from definitely yes to probably to maybe not. There is no correct answer as the contextual details vary from place to place.

Instead of getting entangled in the cobweb of answers, let us focus on the core thought and paraphrase the question, “Is the desire to teach somebody a voluntary wish?”

The prima facie answer appears to be straight and simple – “Yes, it is a voluntary wish.” But when delved deeper, other subtle facets of this query are apparent and the initial response sounds naïve.

On a metaphorical level, as a seed sprouts and a bud blooms, a student ripens and feels the necessity from within to share knowledge. Neither anybody commands/instructs to do so nor is it a conscious decision, it is just a natural progression.

This ‘urge to share’ is the first lamp-post on the journey to become a teacher. The process of learning transforms a student into a teacher. It is a gentle and gradual internal evolution.

No single moment in this voyage can be pinpointed as, “the moment of transformation.”

Maharshi Patanjali’s words, “*jatyantara parinama*” – process of evolution from one species to another, clearly defines this transformation. Needless to say, teaching can never be a profession that one can be trained in or a skill-set that one can acquire. Neither is teaching an obligation.

Guruji said, “Teaching is commitment, it is a responsibility, a process of paying forwards with gratitude, the information, knowledge and wisdom you have gained from your guru and the subject of Yoga.”

In this light, let us look at the history of teachers in Iyengar Yoga. Guruji, in the 1960s, observed ‘the urge to share knowledge’ in some of his students. He asked them to take the subject to their countries. They were the ‘first batch of Iyengar Yoga teachers.’ Later on, some students sought permission to teach. Guruji granted it as they were directly trained under him for many years. He was confident of their abilities to spread the message of yoga in its purest form.

As time traveled, interest in yoga grew by leaps and bounds. Students from all corners of the world started coming in. Need for properly trained teachers was on a steep rise.

Considering the time and communication constraints, Guruji advised his senior students and the then teachers to assess who has the ability and desire to teach. The assessment process came into existence at that time. To help the assessors, Guruji designed and documented a formal framework. Over a period of time, when needed, Guruji mended this framework and over time, formulated a detailed ‘teachers training and assessment process.’ This was a part of the ‘Pune Constitution.’ Our new assessment process has its roots in that document. Nowadays interest in ‘becoming a yoga teacher’ seems to be in vogue. Institute is flooded with such queries. The following questions arise:

- Why are so many people interested in teaching yoga rather than studying the subject?
- Why are they in such a hurry to establish themselves as “yoga teachers?”
- Are they interested mainly in the phenomenal benefits of yoga, like good health, decent living, respect in society, opportunities to travel around the globe?
- Or, is there an ardent zeal to go on the path of self-realization which is the ultimate goal of yoga?

As expected, answers are not simple. When we dig deeper, ethico-moral confusions start surfacing. To clear them up, we need to examine the basic premise.

What is the intent, context and focus behind this wish to become a Yoga teacher?

Maharshi Patanjali in the fourth chapter of Yoga Sutra mentions -

“*hetu, phala, aashraya and aalambana*” – intention, fruit of action, context and foundation stones.

He instructs us to examine these hidden aspects of any action. In this light, if we examine the wish to become a yoga teacher, the first and foremost genuine query is, how can a person, prior to learning the subject, know beforehand, that he or she wants to teach it.

Is it not necessary to check whether he or she is even interested in it, leave alone being equipped to do so? Or do the material benefits adulterate the intention?

Guruji stated categorically, “One who has not learnt the subject thoroughly cannot teach. If one attempts to do so, he or she is going to harm; harm the society, the subject and oneself.”

His words guide us like a lighthouse. The only debatable point in Guruji’s above said statement is, how to quantify the word ‘thoroughly’?

Guruji’s advice is that 6 years is a fair time in which one can learn the skills to become a teacher in yoga and this has stood the test of time.

Let us know his thoughts on this process of becoming a teacher and see how he did it.

Guruji learnt under his guru for two years and was sent to Pune to teach. When he started teaching, he had twofold responsibilities, firstly a practitioner and secondly ‘a forced teacher.’

He did justice to both. In retrospect, it seems to be a blessing in disguise! Based on his own practice, Guruji could define and design various levels, configure different syllabi according to the need on this journey and the necessity to pen down meticulous instructions. All these things are reflected in his first masterpiece – *Light on Yoga*. Now the times have changed and so have the communication modalities. Along with this, we have Guruji’s work as a reference point. In the new system, neither do we intend to suggest any change in the internal process of learning, nor do we hint that sincere, ardent practice with burning zeal is not necessary. We do not deviate from any of Guruji’s teachings. We are just trying to ease the system by taking advantage of what we have. Be assured, the proposal for a new assessment system is to make the learning and teaching of yoga contemporary, more objective and simpler; but it has its roots in Guruji’s teachings and the Pune Constitution. In Iyengar Yoga, the phrase “TTC- Teachers Training Course” has widespread popularity. Not that everybody likes or adores it, but that the concept is popular is a reality. Let us concentrate on the present picture of TTC. Refinement in skillset to equip the ‘would be teacher’ is the ‘stated’ purpose of TTC.

With this background:

- Each teacher trainer must pose this moral question – Is the purpose fulfilled?
- Each teacher trainee must pose this logical question – Is the purpose fulfilled?

Are the sensitivities and intricacies in Guruji’s teachings shared and handed over to the new generation of teachers? Or, has TTC become a set model, where there is a collection of people who are handed over a manual on what instructions to give for each *asana* so that they may clear the assessment? Has it become an event which generates immense stress? Is it the pivotal thing that can make or break somebody’s career as an Iyengar Yoga teacher?

The first response of denial would be in the lines of - “The picture is unrealistic; over inflated and biased.”

Everybody, when asked personally, will come up with a “correct” answer.

“Others may be doing it but not me,” is the feedback we received time and again.

Unfortunately, whispers speak a different language. Are we shunning reality?

We all need to undergo scrutiny of our own conscience and honestly address these concerns we know ‘would be teachers’ are a ‘handle with care’ entity. Once upon a time we all were in those shoes.

Budding teachers are eager and anxious, enthusiastic and in awe, sharp and tentative, simultaneously. It is a teacher’s or a mentor’s responsibility to generate a cozy and caring atmosphere wherein the newcomers can bloom and feel at home.

TTC must be a gentle, cordial and confidence building exercise which infuses 'would be teachers' with love and joy for our system.

Precision, timing and sequencing are not only the pillars for *asanas*, they are catalysts for refinement in the process of understanding yoga. It may seem to be a laborious task for somebody, for others, it may just be a fine tuning in thought.

Naturally, a predefined structural framework for TTC is not an appropriate concept. To escalate TTC from a mere 'instruction and symposium of addition of points,' the trainer has to graduate to a level of mentor.

Who is a mentor?

Oxford dictionary states, "mentor is an experienced person in an organization or institution who trains and advises new employees or students." The word is coined after Mentor, adviser of Telemachus in Odyssey.

In yogic context, we can attribute greater meaning to it. The one who teaches is a teacher, one who guides is a mentor and the one who takes to the destination is a guru. For a yoga *sadhaka*, a mentor is a senior adviser who has walked the path, who knows the nuances and intricacies of the journey, who will make the *sadhaka* aware of them and will help one to negotiate with them. If one happens to get trapped and slips from the *sadhana* path, a mentor will be there for rescue and support. Metaphorically, guru shows the light, mentor navigates, teacher trains and student (*sadhaka*) undertakes the journey. Mentor is a bridge between the guru and a teacher. But it is not a hierarchical rung. It is not a linear process where one first becomes a teacher, then a mentor and finally a guru. Mentorship has a specific responsibility. Responsibility of extending a helping hand, accompanying *sadhaka* on the path of *sadhana* and seeing him/her reach the destination. Mentor is a senior colleague, advisor, and a friend par excellence at the same time. The role of a teacher, mentor and guru may overlap or may remain distinct as per the need of the situation. If a *sadhaka* is fortunate, he/she may confront a person who is embodiment of all three and who has discrimination (*viveka*) to adopt a role according to the need. A mentor never discourages anybody.

The teacher, in view of improvement, may be harsh and strict regarding the instructions delivered. He/she may admonish somebody to get the best out of him/her. A mentor does not. He/she must have the grasp of reality which is far bigger than the manifested moment. He/she understands and comprehends the reality-picture to its minutest detail, but he/she cannot demoralize or discourage anybody. A mentor must be prepared with the solution. At times, a guru may not be available, accessible for him/her or the problem may be mundane; in such a situation a mentor is the real confidant and alliance of *sadhaka* in the path of *sadhana*. The mentor contributes to the value system of *sadhaka* and helps him/her become a good human being. Maharshi Patanjali, while stating the fruits of *yoga-sadhana* or *yoganganushthana*, categorically states the concepts of *ashudhhikshaya* (elimination of impurities) and *vivekakhyaati* (dawn of discrimination). These are essential to reach that pinnacle of being a mentor. Mentor is a friend, philosopher, and guide for *yoga-sadhaka*.

Please note that changing the name of your course from 'TTC' to 'Mentorship course' is not the right way. Two days before her passing our dear Geetaji told us all in the centenary celebration that it is high time we looked for quality in teachers and not quantity of teachers. Request your cooperation to fulfill the wishes of our dear teacher.

With affection,
Abhijata Iyengar

Segue embaixo o documento original enviado por Abhijata Iyengar em resposta ao questionário solicitado pelo RIMYI em Abril 2023, sobre mentoria, cursos de formação e a implementação do novo sistema de avaliação.

FAQS - July 2023

1) Why does RIMYI object to TTCs?

Please read Note 2 - “Teachers, Mentors and TTC” on Page 45 in the RIMYI Certification Guidelines Booklet (see above) that was shared with all associations after the proposed change in certification system.

2) How can I convey the theoretical aspects which I was able to do effectively in a TTC setup?

You may call your mentees together to address concepts that you think are more generic in nature.

3) Is it possible for other methods to participate in TTCs? OR Can CIYTs participate in other method TTCs?

The philosophy and science of Iyengar Yoga is quite unique and cannot be mixed with other methods. Hence, this cannot be accepted. This is also well-articulated in the bylaws of each association.

4) Is it permissible for an Iyengar Yoga teacher to organize TTCs with teachers of other yoga methods as well?

First of all, we do not accept TTC as an approach to train and certify teachers for the reasons stated earlier. However, some certified teachers sought RIMYI’s permission to showcase Iyengar Yoga in courses conducted by other schools of yoga. RIMYI had no objection to this and granted permission. But, Iyengar Yoga sessions cannot be conducted in teacher training courses of other schools of yoga.

5) Is it possible for all centers with the name Iyengar to host other activities (not other yoga methods) and advertise them? What does “as long as the spaces are distincted” mean?

Certified Iyengar Yoga teachers can teach at yoga studios not called “Iyengar Studios” or at places where classes (not necessarily yoga) are taught, as long as the Iyengar Yoga class is a separate, distinct offering and not mixed with other classes / activities. We acknowledge the fact that many certified Iyengar Yoga teachers are unable to afford exclusive studio spaces, and hence might have to cohabit. However, if associations spot irregularities on this front, they should highlight them as done in the past.

And, centers having the “Iyengar” name should not hold yoga classes of other schools or mix other activities with Iyengar Yoga. There are clear guidelines for this.

6) Financial burden on candidates owing to increased duration of an assessment.

The main objective of the new certification process is to make it as simple as possible in sync with current realities, while not compromising one bit on Guruji's method. Now, there will be only 4 levels as against the 13 in the earlier process. Therefore, the total expenditure incurred by the association or the student for assessments will be much less.

7) Logistic issues of finding assessment venues for the weekend We acknowledge that this might be a challenge for some of you initially. However, with some creativity, can we not solve this problem?

All that is required is a clean hall to accommodate the members involved and a way to manage props. It can be a simple, makeshift arrangement. Our community always treasures friendship and close-knit networks which enable good practice, learning & progress in the yogic spirit of *maitri*, i.e., friendliness. This can be helpful in figuring out options for weekend assessments without imposing much financial burden.

Our community is our biggest strength. Find a way to reach out to the student community with these issues and someone may be willing to help us.

Let us always keep in mind that the Iyengar Yoga ecosystem will be the one to gain tremendously if we are able to nurture deserving and passionate teachers.

8) Decreasing number of assessors

All associations should spend time and energy creating a pool of assessors with a pipeline for the future. Mentors / higher-level teachers should play an active role in this while being assessors themselves. If we need great teachers, we need great assessors too.

We should open this up for more discussion and tap good practices on this from across the Iyengar Yoga world.

9) Retakes

Retakes have been introduced primarily to give the candidate an opportunity to try and improve on some activities done by them during the assessment period. Assessors should be fair in allowing retake opportunities provided they feel that the candidate is almost there and should not be made to wait for the next round of assessment.

Hence, this assessment process demonstrates flexibility, and recognizes that candidates can perform below their par/usual capability due to nervousness of being assessed, anxiousness to get certified, etc.

10) Why should assessors and assessees do group practice together?

Practice is the fundamental ground in Iyengar Yoga. Teachers and assessors should have this as a very important part of daily life. This is what has brought us to where we are today. We seniors should look forward to practice sessions with aspiring teachers. Engaging in a practice session during assessment is helpful in many ways. For example,

1. Practice is the only place where you and the assessees get together as co-travelers on the path of yoga without hierarchy. We can get together without such barriers.
2. It puts the student at ease because it is a known terrain for the assessee also. The joy of exploring *asanas* together will put to rest the anxiety of performance. It is our job as seniors to augur such an experience.
3. It is an excellent opportunity to observe the spirit of self-practice in the assessee.

It is shocking that we have received even a single question as to why this slot should exist at all, that too from assessors!

11) Scoring without taking notes

This is something that assessors will get used to over time.

As you can see, the new assessment method moves away from a rigid system of marking to a more contextual and qualitative one. When Guruji was teaching the assessors what to observe, he broke it down into various aspects and the scoring came about. With experience now, the assessors will be quick to observe the overall quality of the presentation and take the appropriate decision. We will not change this as it is in the positive direction.