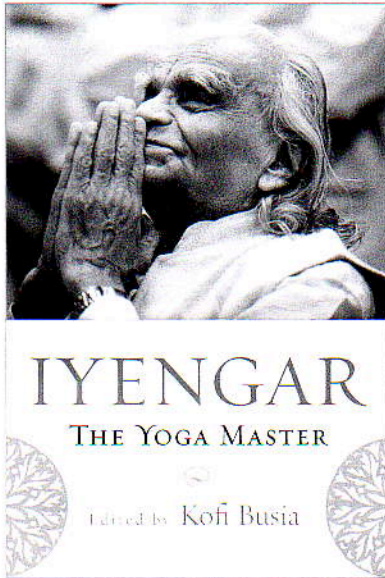


reviews

books



Iyengar: The Yoga Master
edited by Kofi Busia
Shambhala Publications 2007
www.shambhala.com

To many in the West, the name B.K.S. Iyengar has been synonymous with the study and practice of yoga since the mid-1960s. As a result of violinist Sir Yehudi Menuhin “discovering” Iyengar and subsequently introducing him to the West, most classes occurring in the world today have been informed by his method of teaching to some degree. Aspects such as proper alignment, modifications, awareness and poise all echo the methods of this master student of yoga. As a practitioner of Iyengar Yoga myself, I was very interested in reading *Iyengar: The Yoga Master* to find out more about a man whom I have never met, but whose teachings have influenced my life on a deep level.

Noted for his pioneering texts on yoga philosophy such as *Light on Yoga*, *Light on Pranayama*, and *Light on the*

Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, Iyengar certainly deserves to be honoured in a book like this one, which serves as a tribute to his life’s work. Published on the eve of his 90th birthday, *Iyengar: The Yoga Master* serves as an insightful recollection of Iyengar’s loving and exacting methods for teaching yoga to his many students and admirers. Many of the contributors to this volume are big names in the world of yoga, and each has humbly written a chapter sharing stories and insights that are a testimonial to the massive impact of Iyengar’s teaching. Notable teachers such as Shiva Rea, Baron Baptiste, T. K. V. Desikachar, John Friend, Rodney Yee and Patricia Walden all bow down at the feet of Iyengar in the form of a collective memoir.

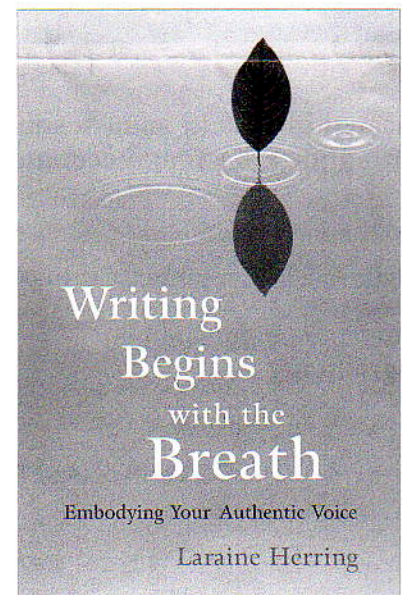
From a historical perspective, this book allows the reader to catch a glimpse of the effect of Iyengar’s influence and how yoga has taken root in our social consciousness over the past few decades – from its humble beginnings in community centres to the multitude of large-scale international yoga conferences now happening throughout the world. The book also includes information about physiology, psychology, Sankhya philosophy, Ayurveda and yoga therapy, all of which inform Iyengar’s method of teaching.

Each chapter is sewn together seamlessly by editor Kofi Busia, starting with a short thought, philosophy or memory relating to Iyengar. Busia, who is himself a senior Iyengar teacher, has a way of letting the essence of his teacher shine through. Having not been in the presence of B. K. S. Iyengar before, I developed a deeper understanding and relationship with him by reading the abundantly warm reminiscences in this tribute.

Though it is not a manual, this book inspires correct yoga practice. As illustrated in the book, tapping into this

potential can guide the reader on beginning, continuing and inspiring others to observe and apply the invaluable teachings of yoga in their life. These teachings were meant for the world, and this book sheds light on how lovingly Sri B.K.S. Iyengar has devoted his life to bringing this ancient wisdom alive. ☸

— Paul Gangadeen



Writing Begins with the Breath: Embodying Your Authentic Voice
by Laraine Herring
Shambhala Publications 2007
www.shambhala.com

There is something very attractive in the notion that, through writing, we can reveal ourselves, express our humanity and even heal ourselves, and there are almost as many books on the market about the writing process as there are people who want to be writers. But do we write to become better people? Does self-improvement, in turn, make us better writers?

These are the questions I asked myself as I read Laraine Herring’s *Writing*



Begins with the Breath, a book that combines advice on writing with yoga “Body Breaks,” as well as Buddhist philosophy and practices. As a practitioner of all three, I was very curious about how my existing spiritual pursuits could serve to make me a better, or at least more grounded, writer.

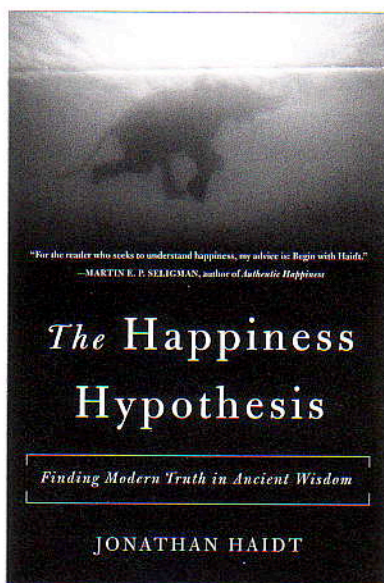
The book, which is divided into three sections, is chockfull of wise observations and advice. The first section encourages the writer to explore his or her relationship to the act of writing itself; the second looks at some of the more concrete and practical issues in the writing process (such as setting, voice, characterization and discipline); and the final section explores themes related to the completion of writing, including post-project blues, the necessity of letting go of the work and the need to surrender the self in order to allow writing to emerge beyond the constraints of the writer’s ego.

Each chapter ends with a series of suggested exercises meant to trigger free-writing and self-exploration, and some of these prompts are excellent. Writers in any stage of their process would do well to ask themselves what fear, risk or change means to them, to look at what would be lost if they stopped writing and to determine what their obstacles are on the creative path. Some of the less concrete prompts miss the mark: How exactly does one “wine and dine” one’s writing? And how does writing the story of the relationship to a particular tree teach about setting?

Writing Begins with the Breath is an encouraging, friendly book that does not shy away from the difficulties of the writing process, and offers solutions to blocks of body, mind and spirit. There is much to be learned about all three here, but as a reader and a writer I felt

a split focus, with more emphasis on self-improvement than on the development of the work itself. Knowing and grounding ourselves might indeed make us better people, but the best writing not only takes us out of ourselves, it is often far wiser than we will ever be. ☸

— Tess Fragoulis



The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom

by Jonathan Haidt

Basic Books 2006

www.basicbooks.com

Happiness, it seems, is more in what we avoid than what we seek. In this wonderful book, Jonathan Haidt tells us how our popular pursuit of happiness needs to be challenged, showing that it isn’t as hard (or as expensive) as we are inclined to believe, but it does require plotting a new course.

Haidt builds his story on ten Great Ideas drawn from classical thought, East and West – from the Upanishads to the teachings of the Buddha, from the Old and New Testaments to Greek and

Roman philosophers. He questions each in light of what is now known from scientific research. For him, it isn’t a matter of belief in what someone else is telling us, as much as a matter of knowing what can transform our lives. Haidt’s well-researched book shows that we know a lot more about happiness than we are applying.

The book starts with an exploration of how our minds work, and this is not how we might suppose; we are of two minds, and they often conflict. “Like a rider on the back of an elephant, the conscious, reasoning part of the mind has only limited control of what the elephant does.” Haidt says that we have to start by finding ways to have the “rider” and the “elephant” work better as a team – a metaphor that the author uses with brilliance throughout the first section of the book.

Refreshingly, *The Happiness Hypothesis* does what it claims in showing us how seemingly simple things such as the Golden Rule and understanding our own in-built hypocrisy (the “rose-coloured mirror” problem) lead us within, where we can re-examine our tendency to try to make the world conform to our desires.

Haidt’s use of current psychological research challenges the stoic idea that we ought to break our emotional attachments to people and events, which opens up new ways to look at where love comes from and what “true” love might be. But he goes even further, giving us important insights on why we so often grow from adversity and why “freedom can be hazardous to your health.” He shows how virtue and morality can be developed and strengthened by going back to the more expansive ideas of the ancients.

In a clear and non-dogmatic way,