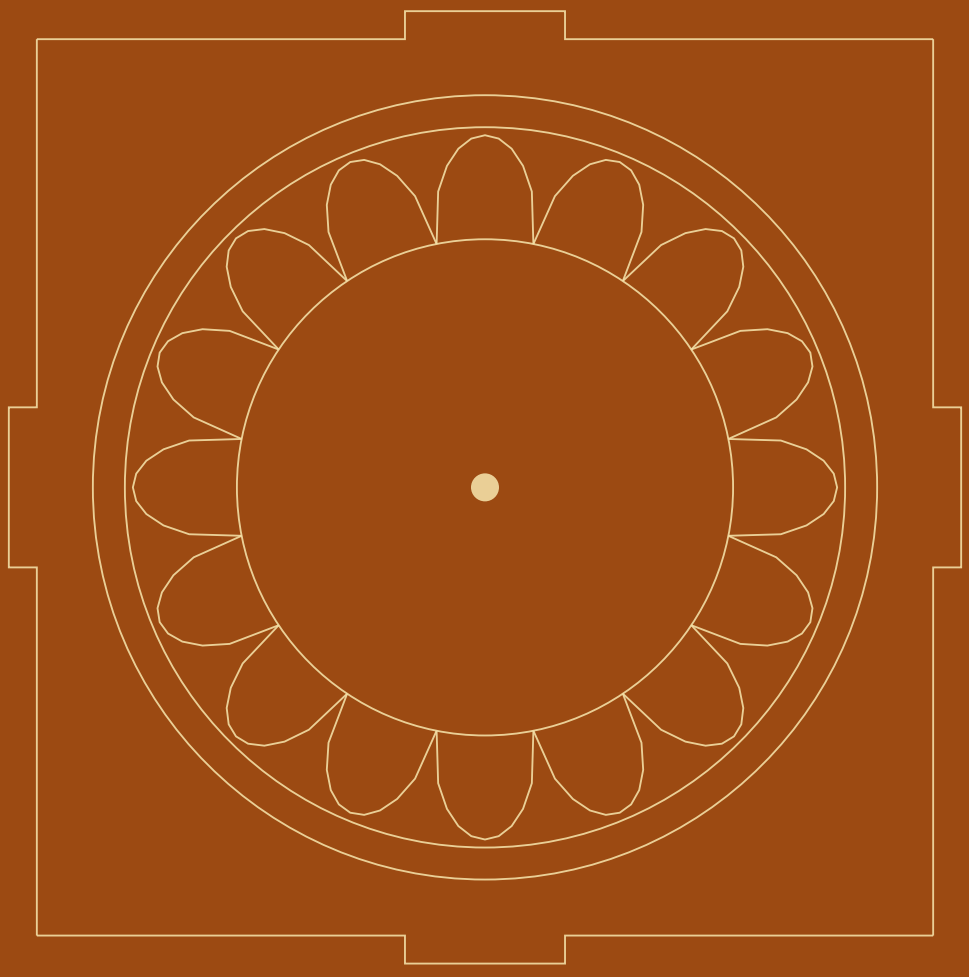
PRACTICE

Precision and Props: Alignment Yoga at Home

Postures held and built step by step with a wall, a chair, a belt and blankets, the documented history of the Pune lineage, and four sessions for stiff, tired or busy days



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Free sample

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Before you begin

In a large hall in Pune, a woman in her sixties stands with her back against a wall, a wooden block between her thighs, a belt around her upper arms. She is doing the mountain pose: standing. The teacher has been talking about her feet for five minutes. Nobody in the room finds this strange. They know that a posture is built from the ground up, that the body learns precision before it learns depth, and that a wall, a block and a belt can teach what years of effort alone sometimes cannot.

This is the world of alignment yoga: postures held, not passed through; built step by step; corrected in detail; supported by props so that a stiff, tired, injured or older body can still find the shape and stay in it long enough to learn from it. Its best-known teacher was B.K.S. Iyengar (1918-2014), who taught in Pune from 1937 until his death. Its influence reaches far beyond the classes that bear his name: the blocks, belts and blankets now found in yoga studios largely go back to his teaching.

This book does four things.

First, it tells the history precisely: Krishnamacharya's Mysore, Iyengar's long apprenticeship, Light on Yoga (1966), the institute in Pune, and the much older history of props in India, from the yogi's strap carved at Sanchi to the meditation crutch.

Second, it explains why one holds a posture and why one uses props, with the texts: Patañjali's steady and easeful seat, the firmness that the Gheraṇḍa Saṃhitā asks of posture.

Third, it gives you a method you can practise alone at home with a wall, a chair, a belt, blankets and two books: standing postures at the wall, supported forward bends, chest openings on the chair, prepared inversions (and when to abstain), breathing lying on a support, and four complete sessions for a stiff back, heavy legs, the end of the day and the morning.

Fourth, it is honest about what it is not. "Iyengar Yoga" is a protected name, taught only by certified teachers. This book is not Iyengar Yoga, is not written by a certified Iyengar teacher, and claims no authorisation. It explains the lineage by reference, shows where the method comes from, and gives a home practice of alignment and props built from public principles and our own experience. Chapter 11 explains the certification and where to find a certified teacher.

> **About the translations.**
>
> All translations of Sanskrit verses in this book were written for Yogide from the Sanskrit text. They are not copied or adapted from any modern published translation. Light on Yoga and the other books of B.K.S. Iyengar are cited and summarised; they are never copied.

> **Health first.**
>
> Alignment yoga is physical, and holding postures is demanding. Talk to your doctor before you start if you are pregnant or have recently given birth; if you have heart disease, high or low blood pressure, glaucoma or a detached retina, a hernia, osteoporosis, a recent injury or operation, a spinal problem, or

joint replacements. Stop at once and seek help if you feel chest pain, breathlessness out of proportion, palpitations, faintness, a sudden severe headache, or numbness or weakness on one side. Emergency numbers: 911 (US, Canada), 999 or 112 (UK), 112 (EU, India), 000 (Australia). Chapter 13 gives the precautions in full; each posture has its own.

How the texts are numbered

- **Yoga Sūtra (YS)**: GRETIL text, as in our The Yoga Sutras of Patañjali, Sutra by Sutra; the commentary attributed to Vyāsa: GRETIL, input by Philipp A. Maas from the Ānandāśrama edition (Pune, 1904).
- **Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā (HYP)**: GRETIL electronic text (version of 31 July 2020), as in Hatha Yoga Pradipika Explained; 1.19 has the same number in Pancham Sinh's public-domain translation (1915).
- **Gheraṇḍa Saṃhitā (GS)**: GRETIL text, typed from Peter Thomi's edition (1993); Vasu's public-domain translation (1914-1915) numbers 1.10-11 together.

How to use this book

Read Chapters 1 to 3 first; then build your props (Chapter 3). Learn the standing postures at the wall (Chapter 4) for two weeks before anything else: they are the school of alignment. Add the forward bends (Chapter 5), then the chair (Chapter 6). Read Chapter 7 on inversions slowly, and keep its warnings. Then practise the four sessions of Chapter 9 according to the day.

Chapter 1. B.K.S. Iyengar, Krishnamacharya, Pune: the history

A sickly boy from Bellur

Bellur Krishnamachar Sundararaja Iyengar was born on **14 December 1918** in Bellur, in the Kolar district of present-day Karnataka, the eleventh of thirteen children of a poor family. He was born during the influenza pandemic, and spent his childhood ill: malaria, tuberculosis, typhoid, malnutrition. He later wrote that his arms were thin, his legs spindly, and that he had to lift his head with effort. His father died just before his ninth birthday.

With Krishnamacharya (1934)

In **1934**, his brother-in-law **T. Krishnamacharya**, who ran the yoga school of the Mysore palace (see our book Vinyasa: Breath-Linked Movement from Krishnamacharya to Today), asked the fifteen-year-old to come to Mysore to improve his health through postures. The relationship was difficult: according to Iyengar's own accounts, Krishnamacharya first predicted that the stiff, sickly teenager would not succeed, set him household chores, and only later taught him a series of difficult postures. Iyengar said that his teacher had taught him for only ten or fifteen days over two years, but that those days determined what he became.

Pune (from 1937)

In **1937**, at eighteen, Krishnamacharya sent him to **Pune** to teach. He stayed there for the rest of his life. Far from his teacher, with few students at first, he deepened the postures through his own daily practice and, over the years, developed the use of everyday objects (belts, blocks, blankets, benches, ropes on the wall) to help his students. This is the origin of what the world now calls yoga props.

Menuhin, the West, Light on Yoga

In **1952** he met the violinist **Yehudi Menuhin** in Bombay. Menuhin became his student and in 1954 invited him to Switzerland; from then on Iyengar visited the West regularly. In **1966**, Iyengar published ***Light on Yoga*** (in Sanskrit, Yoga Dīpikā), with a foreword by Menuhin, first published in English by George Allen and Unwin. The book describes more than two hundred postures, illustrated by some six hundred black-and-white photographs of Iyengar himself, with their Sanskrit names, a grade of difficulty, step-by-step instructions, an introduction to the eight limbs, an account of breathing, and an appendix of graded weekly courses. It has been translated into at least twenty-three languages and has sold more than three million copies. Scholars have called it the "bible of modern yoga".

The institute (1975) and after

In **1975** Iyengar opened the **Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute** (RIMYI) in Pune, named after his wife Ramamani, who had died in 1973. He officially retired from teaching in 1984 but continued to give special classes, lectures and books until the end of his life, including Light on Prāṇāyāma (1981) and Light on the Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali. He received the Padma Shri (1991), the Padma Bhushan (2002) and the Padma Vibhushan (2014). He died in Pune on **20 August 2014**, aged ninety-five.

His daughter **Geeta Iyengar** (1944-2018), known for her work on yoga for women, and his son **Prashant Iyengar** became teachers of international standing; his granddaughter **Abhijata Sridhar Iyengar** teaches at the institute and abroad.

The three marks of the method

Writers on the method usually describe three distinguishing features:

Feature	What it means	What you will practise in this book
Precision	each posture built step by step, from the feet up, misalignments explained and corrected	standing postures at the wall (Chapter 4)
Sequence	the order of postures chosen for an effect, varied from class to class	four sessions (Chapter 9)
Props	belts, blocks, blankets, chairs, ropes, benches, used to make a posture possible, safe and long	throughout, with household objects

Postures are held relatively long, so that the muscles can release and the attention can enter the posture. Standing postures come early, even for beginners. Inversions are given great importance, with blankets to protect the neck, and taught carefully by certified teachers (Chapter 7).

What this lineage is not

It is not "gentle yoga" (holding a standing posture with precision for a minute is demanding). It is not a style of physiotherapy, although many people with limitations practise it. And it is not the only valid way: the same teacher, Krishnamacharya, also produced the flowing Ashtanga of Pattabhi Jois. The review of 306 trials by Cramer and colleagues (Chapter 12) found that trials of different yoga styles reached positive conclusions equally often.

Practise: your own starting point

Stand barefoot on the floor, eyes closed, for one minute. Where is your weight: heels, toes, inner or outer feet? Write one sentence. You will come back to this sentence at the end of the book.

End of the sample

Thank you for reading this far. We hope these first pages already help your practice, and that they show how the rest of the book is built: clear steps, texts quoted with their source, nothing invented.

The full book has 36 pages.

Get it here: https://yogide.com/books/precision-and-props-alignment-yoga-at-home/

One-time payment, instant PDF.