

The IYN Story

Part One - Conception

Having just returned from my morning walk, and as the rain hits the open window and the smell of summer wetness drifts in, I find myself thinking about the umbrella that is currently dripping water onto the hall carpet. My feelings about this umbrella are not complex. To sum it up, I'm glad that I have it but I wish it wasn't quite so necessary. This reminds me of something else that I can't quite place right now. But never mind all that; I need now to turn my mind to the series of articles I agreed to write, looking at the story of the Independent Yoga Network (IYN), of which this is the first.

Over the next few issues of Namaskaram, I will be exploring this story from the IYN's inception to the present day. I will be looking at where we are now, how we got here and even, perhaps, where we might find ourselves in the future. I will be talking to some of the movers and shakers of the organisation for you and generally getting the inside dope on what I know to be a very interesting story indeed.

The IYN has been in existence for seven years now. Over this time it has tirelessly flown the flag for Yoga and for the freedom of Yoga. It was established in 2004 by a group of concerned teacher trainers. They saw that Yoga was in danger of being appropriated by corporate interests and strangled by the accompanying bureaucracy. They were also alarmed that sections of the Yoga community appeared to collaborating in this attempted takeover.

By 2004, the fitness industry had appointed itself emperor-in-waiting of Planet Yoga. By attempting to define acceptable Yoga teaching, it was poised and ready to absorb Yoga into its menu of activities. This vast, diverse and ancient yet vitally alive spiritual practice was about to be reduced to something akin to step classes or kick-boxing.

To an onlooker, and at a cursory glance, it might have seemed a reasonable proposition that the fitness industry should have a regulatory role in Yoga teaching. But to anyone with any experience at all of a Yoga practice, the idea was quite as absurd and troubling as the British Institute of Interior Design being allowed to say who can or cannot be an artist. The fitness industry was setting its own agenda in a field of which it was utterly ignorant.

For centuries, wise yogis have found it understandably problematic to find an easy definition for Yoga. The opening of the human spirit to the universe is, it seems, a tricky thing to pin down. But by the early Twenty-First Century, it appeared that a coterie of men with designer suits and questionable motives had come up with a definition. And here's the rub; by defining something, you define its boundaries. One definition of definition is limitation.

The IYN was conceived, then, because it was needed, but it was not to be a regulatory body. It would not insist that Yoga should be standardised or conform to this or that notion. It would understand that Yoga is as diverse as those who live it. And it would acknowledge that Yoga has come to us through many cultural and spiritual traditions but is not in thrall to any of them. Above all, it would operate in the understanding that Yoga *is* freedom and that freedom is worth fighting for. Around the time the IYN was set up, rumours abounded in the Yoga press and the community at large that a deadline of 2008 had been set for regulatory changes and that all Yoga teachers would have to come up to scratch against the fitness industry's arbitrary standards by this date or risk being barred as teachers. All of this was, of course, nonsense. There are not now, nor have there ever been any legal requirements specific to the teaching of Yoga.

The first job of the IYN, then, would be to set the record straight and to inform trainers, teachers, employers and the wider public of the true state of affairs regarding regulation (or more accurately, the absence of regulation). The next task would be to set up register of teachers and teacher training. The key to the success of this register would be its flexibility. It would have to provide reassurance to the public but it also would be careful to avoid restrictions and regulations lest it become the very thing it was set up to counter. Uniquely amongst Yoga organisations, the IYN would take the yogic principles of *Satya* (truthfulness), *Ahimsa* (non-harming) and *Svadhyaya* (self-study) as its guide.

These guidelines were felt to be robust enough to ensure the quality and safety of teaching, whilst being broad enough to encompass the rich diversity of Yoga. There was to be no bias toward a particular approach and no sectarianism. It was felt to be imperative that *all* good Yoga teachers should have access to the whole of the economy and not be excluded from working in gyms, leisure venues or anywhere else.

This yogic basis for the registration criteria would be used because the only appropriate standard by which one might judge the quality of Yoga teaching is surely Yoga itself. Previously, everyone involved (the names and roles of some of the major protagonists are given elsewhere in this issue), had seemed to want make Yoga acceptable to a structure outside of itself. They had sought to change (ie reduce) Yoga to make it fit into non-yogic ideas of what it ought to be. The IYN was to be different. As the tagline goes: By Yogis for Yoga.

So there it is - an admittedly very brief sketch of the origins of the IYN. What happened thereafter, leading to where we are now is a matter for later issues. I'm afraid you will have to be patient. What I can say is that through persistence, co-operation, the occasional argument and sheer bloody-mindedness, the IYN has made great progress in making its voice heard. Even the fitness industry's representative bodies now acknowledge that they have neither the expertise nor the right to say who can or cannot teach Yoga.

Nevertheless threats still exist. Depressingly, there are still those who would like to put *your* Yoga into *their* box. But fear not, dear reader, for the IYN will continue to fight the good fight for Yoga and will work like Billy-O to protect this thread of exquisite silk that has woven its way to us through continents and centuries by way of countless human hearts.

The IYN Story

Part Two – In Conversation with Pete Yates

In *The IYN Story - Part One*, your intrepid reporter promised to talk to some of the movers and shakers in the Independent Yoga Network. So a few weeks ago, fortified by tea and biscuits, I spoke to longstanding yogi and erstwhile IYN chair, Pete Yates, at his home, The Parkdale Yoga Centre, in darkest Wolverhampton. Pete was certainly influential in the early organisation and continues to play an active role, but, as he points out early on in our conversation, this is the story told from his own perspective.

Our conversation is reproduced in full below. It is for the sake of clarity rather than any sense of self importance that my words are shown in bold.

Matthew Head

I'm interested in the origins of the IYN. What was the original spark and who was involved? How did you perceive the problem that the IYN was conceived to address?

What I am going to say to you is my side of the story. There were other people involved early on, as there are now. So this is one perspective but I can tell you how I experienced it.

My part in the birth of the IYN was initially a reaction - a reaction to a specific article written by Paul Fox that appeared in *Yoga Magazine* in 2004. I hadn't seen the article when my student, Simon, first drew my attention to it during a Yoga weekend here. He said, 'Oh, I hear that Yoga is going to be regulated. There is an article in this magazine, but we are alright because Heart Yoga (our school) is one of the organizations recognised by the Register of Exercise Professionals' [REPS]. This was news to me so I asked him to send me the article to have a look at. The article didn't in fact refer to us; it turned out there was another organization using the same name, which was one of the British Wheel of Yoga's affiliated schools. (They have changed their name subsequently.)

When I read the article, suddenly it looked as though our activity was going to have no credibility. What we were doing had been defined as maverick by this article. The gist of it was that REPS were now going to regulate Yoga and, because they'd got a kind of governmental connection, it actually would become an official regulation of Yoga. The article pointed out that unless you were in some way affiliated with the British Wheel (either as one of their teachers, a British Wheel diploma course tutor or as one of the half a dozen or so schools that had affiliated with the Wheel) that you would be out in the cold.

Paul Fox was saying that you wouldn't be able to get employment as a Yoga teacher or even suitable insurance unless you were within this British Wheel pale. He said, 'This beast has teeth', meaning REPS. He quoted the then registrar of REPS as saying that the remit of REPS was going to extend right the way across society and that you wouldn't

even be able to hire a church hall or village hall. It was going to be that powerful.

So this set alarm bells for me, mainly because I was training a few teachers. When you train teachers, you take them under your wing. They are giving you money to have this training, and they want to have credibility at the end of it and be able to use it to get employment if they want to. I thought, I am offering this thing, which people are paying me good money for and, if it's going to be worthless because of this propaganda, I need to do something about it. It wasn't for myself that I was concerned because I've got the Parkdale Yoga Centre, which runs fine and I'm answerable to no one outside of the demands of decency and the common law. I do what I like here and it works. But I did feel an outrage on behalf of the people who had asked me to help them to become Yoga teachers through the deepening of their practice.

And that's always what I have been asked to do. People ask me to help them deepen their practice and *then* they might teach, you know. So I was outraged because it seemed so out of order. Paul Fox's article displayed a crowing triumphalism and *Schadenfreude*. He was saying that the rest of us, the mavericks, were being left out in the cold and the good and respectable middle class people at the British Wheel of Yoga were now going to rule the roost. So I thought, I'm not having it.

So then you wrote your response?

Well, I felt that we needed something more fluid and more respectable than the Wheel was offering, because the Wheel was attempting to regulate Yoga whilst being a training school itself. My first thought was that we needed something rather like the Yoga Alliance.

I had registered our school with the Yoga Alliance which is how I knew about it. I hadn't wanted to register and I resisted it, but my students had asked me to so that they could announce some kind of broader affiliation, which is understandable. They wanted to belong to a family group or to have had their work looked over by their peers and vouched for. So I thought we needed something like that that could give teachers a home, reassure the public and break the monopoly that BWY and REPS were developing.

The Yoga Alliance, which was a US based organization, though, weren't able to help people based outside of the US. In fact, I wrote to them as soon as all this was afoot, and I didn't even get a reply. I thought well, you know, this is crap! All I had asked for was for help to set something up similar over here. I wanted to know how they had done it. And nothing - not a peep - not even the decency to reply. This made me think they were just taking the money and running. It was costing me over £200 a year to have that little bit of paper, which apparently would now become worthless.

So, yes I wrote a response, which *Yoga Magazine* kindly published without editing. My reply was a call out to say if anybody sees any sense in what I've said here, get in touch with me. I said was that we need something like the Yoga Alliance, which is neutral and doesn't itself train teachers. It just operates a registration scheme, which is there to reassure the public that they are getting decent teachers and reassure teacher-trainees that they are going to have some kind of credibility when they get out there, hawking their wares in society at large. REPs and Skillsactive, which owns REPs, are fitness organizations basically owned by and run in the interests of the corporates. So they shouldn't be in the position of saying who can and who can't teach Yoga.

It seemed to me to be logical and sensible to let people from the very diverse world of

Yoga express themselves and to share their Yoga in their own way. To my mind that has got to be right, whatever we personally think of other people's way of doing it. At the end of the day, there's an issue around spiritual freedom. The attempt to regulate in that very tight way with some government stamp of approval was really against the whole thrust of Yoga itself, which struck me as having some kind of radical freedom at its heart.

Any register of Yoga that we might create would have to honour that freedom. There would have to be criteria, of course, but at the same time they mustn't inhibit that core freedom. So that really was a conundrum.

As well as publishing the letter I also went to the Yoga Alliance website and looked for any other UK teacher-training schools that were registered, because they were the ones that would be getting sidelined. I forget how many there were - about a dozen or something like that. So I contacted all of them by email initially. I also looked round the web and contacted a few others who I thought might be interested in getting something going. They didn't all reply. Some said they were going to join the British Wheel or they were going to try and approach REPs independently. I read these replies with quite a heavy heart. I thought, *Don't they see it? REPs has no expertise and no moral right whatsoever to interfere in this field, and we must stop them.* There were also one or two who didn't reply at all. But the majority did and they were up for seeing what could be organised.

So was that the original moment?

From my end, that was the original moment. I spoke to a couple of people on the telephone. And we arranged to meet up at the second Yoga show. So I went down to London and we had an impromptu meeting in the dining room at Olympia. Someone went round the entire show looking for anyone who might be interested to get them in on the meeting. So the initial meeting was right there in the dining room at lunchtime, and there were over a dozen people. Some were jobbing teachers who sat in because they were interested. Others had teacher training programmes or wanted to set them up. Initially we decided to call it the Independent Yoga Alliance and they elected me as chair, on the basis that I had written this letter and probably that I had the biggest gob. And then it was up and running. We started from there and tried to build it up.

How did it then move from that into a more formal organization?

By a very organic and tumultuous process. At first, we only really knew that we had to 'do something' and that some kind of register would be a part of it. But there were various ideas about the best direction to go in. What I can tell you about that is that it was a lot more multi-stranded than some people want to make out. Several contradictory directions were offered and argued for. 'Freedom and independence' was only placed centre stage through struggle, argument and hard work. At least one vocal early member thought the IYN would be a good way for us collectively to go through the ridiculously expensive and totally inappropriate process of becoming Skills Active fitness schools, with that clever, articulate bloke Pete Yates doing all the paper work. At least one other had a vision of a '*sangha*'. Someone else thought that statutory regulation was inevitable and that the government would only negotiate with the biggest organisation, so it was a numbers game. So it was out of that ferment that we came up with a constitution that had the freedom and independence of Yoga at its heart. At that point we were an unincorporated association and the advice was that incorporation would protect the activists in the IYN from dirty tricks. A company limited by guarantee was without a doubt the best option. Charity status

was too restrictive. Community Interest Companies are forbidden to engage in politics. So a simple legal framework for our activities proved the best option.

I take it you were pretty active in this phase of the IYN's development?

Yes. Somebody had to take a bit of a lead and I was passionate about not letting the British Wheel, in league with the fitness industry, get away with it. To me it just looked like an attempt to create a hegemony or a monopoly. At that time, the Wheel had been proclaiming its superiority over everyone else for years. It had been the 'governing body' since the nineties. Even though that is a completely meaningless term, they never denied that it had any legal force, which of course it doesn't. It's a non-protected term. It's just a Sports England term. In fact, it was originally created by the old UK Sports Council who said that Yoga needed a governing body, because it was a sport or a physical activity. The Wheel went for it, for whatever reason, and, to my mind, misrepresented its true import. It's got no meaning. We could call ourselves 'The Governing Body for Yoga' if we wanted to. It's just a title and an inappropriate one at that.

The Wheel for reasons best known to itself has always attempted to cosy up to the government. But actually no political party and no-one at the heart of government is the least bit interested in Yoga. They wouldn't touch it with a bargepole. So anyone looking for official kudos has to go as near to the government as they can get, which means a quango like Sports England or bodies like REPs and Skillsactive, who are licensed by the government to deal with training in the fitness and outdoor leisure sectors of the economy. They are run and funded by the industry but *licensed* by the government.

The move to get an exclusive deal with REPs was part of this syndrome of wanting to be 'official'. It struck me that nobody in Yoga would want to be official unless they were compensating for some feeling of inferiority. If they knew what they were doing they wouldn't be interested or bothered. In fact, it's always convinced me that they were people with no knowledge, attempting some kind of hegemony and control, which probably had more to do with their own feelings of inferiority and inadequacy than anything real. Nevertheless it had a big impact.

Can you not see that people outside the Yoga world might think that regulation and some kind of official status were good ideas? Perhaps people on the inside are reacting to that because they want to be successful and respectable?

Yes there probably is something of that, but official regulation was *actively* sold by the British Wheel. For years after they had got the governing body status, there were articles in the mainstream press, in which a spokesman from the British Wheel would say something like, *Make sure your Yoga teacher is qualified. Unless they have a British Wheel diploma they are not qualified.* People outside of the Wheel would be phoned up by area representatives and asked if they were qualified. This was not justified by any kind of real expertise in Yoga which only comes about through practice, not by jumping through hoops to gain a quasi-academic diploma.

So I was driven by the thought that these people had *neither the moral right nor the expertise* to say who can and who cannot teach Yoga, and because I wanted to protect my own people. Obviously other things came into view once things started to kick off. For instance, I thought that if Yoga was going to take a significant place within our culture, if it was going to sink in and do some of the wonderful things it can do, it needed that freedom and the freedom to experiment.

If you put four yogis in a room you will have sixteen different disagreements about what really is going on in life, the universe and everything and all the rest of it. It seems to me that if Yoga was going to move into the circulation of our body politic, if it was to grow and develop and become more potent, that it needed that friction between the various views. Placing Yoga under fitness and having it tightly regulated was going to stop that process and we would only have a truncated, *ersatz* non-vital version of Yoga circulating, which wouldn't do anything much. So there was this other thing of wanting to protect the *actual diversity* whatever I thought of what was going on. Any kind of registration schema had to be able to do that.

But it struck me that what the Yoga Alliance had constructed wasn't able to do that, because it required anybody setting up a training school to do so many hours of philosophy, so many hours of anatomy, so many hours of physiology and so on. It *standardised* what should instead be opened up. What Skillsactive were offering was ridiculously tight and narrow and based on the misconception that Yoga practice was a branch of fitness. It became more and more apparent to me that schemas like these were not adequate to the task and actually damaging.

So how would the IYN overcome that dichotomy between freedom and needing some kind of registration scheme?

I think the public is entitled to reassurance when they see an advert in *Yellow Pages* without being too anal or too fearful about that. It struck me that the way to provide that reassurance was *peer review* rather than regulation because regulation makes regular. There was no need to appeal to the government or any agent of the government or to the corporates. In fact appealing to the government and the corporates would be really stupid because they know nothing about it so how can they possibly put anything in place that's going to offer public reassurance given that they have no knowledge? It's also true that they don't have any moral right either. This is to do with freedom of religious practice, freedom of conscience and the right to modify your own consciousness, which are *basic human rights*. They definitely needed to get their sticky little fingers off it.

But, nevertheless, the public needs some reassurance and anyone seeking training needs to know they are spending their time and money on something that is going to have a bit of credibility. The way to do that was with some kind of peer review. I know some people have a problem with that but I don't. I'm quite happy to put my work in front of my peers and explain its rationale and why shouldn't I, if I know what I'm doing? If what you offer is based on your own practice, it gives it confidence and certainty.

There was a lot of communication about all this and one person who came back to me was Godfrey Devereux. He pointed out that this was fraught with danger and I too was alert to that. The IYN, if it wasn't careful, could easily end up simply imitating the Wheel. But perhaps that wouldn't be a terrible thing because it would mean there would be two registering bodies and that would kind of diffuse the situation. Nevertheless we didn't want to give in to that hegemonising tendency or do anything that was going to narrow down the field.

Whatever we came up with had to allow diversity on the one hand and have some kind of rigour on the other. Godfrey had said that we should do something but it needed to be unimpeachable. No-one could say we were narrowing down the field or imposing our own doctrine or not allowing Yoga to grow. And I thought, *OK well let's run with that*. He came

here and we spent two or three days hammering out how we might do it.

What we came up with was the idea of letting the criteria for registration flow out of some very core ideas from Yoga itself. These would be core ideas that anyone in Yoga could subscribe to and that no-one could argue cogently against. This would include everyone whether they were coming from a position of Hindu religiosity, whether they were kind of fitness wallahs or meditators, whether they were Taoists, Sufis or whatever. We could find something core that they could all subscribe to, out of which we could flow some kind of practical requirements.

If we could do this, we could create something we could take out there and recommend to the public and to the Yoga community with a feeling of integrity flowing out of real enquiry.

What we came up with is these three alignments which we believed we could ask teachers to embody:

Ahimsa: ahimsa means non-violence. What Yoga teachers aligned with it offer is not going to cause harm. We can ask Yoga teachers to commit to it and to demonstrate to us that whether they are teaching headstands or sitting meditation that they are reasonably safe - psychologically and physically.

Svadhya: this gets interpreted in a lot of ways. Some people interpret svadhya as studying the texts and the scriptures. I think that's not a bad idea - that people, whatever style they teach, are grounded to some extent in the history of it, in the textual foundation that is either written or spoken and gives the rationale for a particular approach. Now, there is no need to dictate what that approach might be. So we figured, we just need to know what the textual basis of an approach is so we can see that trainers are being thorough and clear about the cultural underpinnings and rationale of what they are offering.

The most important side of svadhya is that it means *self-study*, which basically means internalised practice. *Yoga is a practice*. Whatever practices we do, and there are millions of them, they are nevertheless directed towards our inwardness, our consciousness and our lived experience. So we saw a requirement that teachers are based in experience and practice not purely theoretical work. And we were and continue to be willing to stand up and say, well, we are not going to recommend or vouch for anybody whose work is not based in diligent, authentic practice.

Satya means truthfulness. What that initially meant for us is that if somebody has a certificate that what that certificate attests to is truthful. In other words that some kind of assessment has taken place. If I give you a certificate it's important that I haven't just given it because you gave me fifty quid but because I am seriously willing to vouch for you, having seen what you do and appraised it.

Satya is also about practice. It requires really honest practice with integrity. It isn't just going through the motions. It has to be a genuine engagement with self, with one's own practice, one's own experience and one's own consciousness and unconsciousness.

Of course, those three things don't require us to dictate whether a school is a Vaishnava school, a Shaivite school or a secular school or anything else. It doesn't matter if it's very meditation biased or emphasises more physical Hatha Yoga. We don't have to dictate any of that.

We concluded that we *can* vouch for people if they can show us that they are aligned with those three principles. No knowledgeable Yoga practitioner from whatever cultural base could argue with it. Who in their right mind would say that it's not a good idea to be truthful, or to have some kind of knowledge base? Who would say that Yoga isn't a matter of practice primarily?

So we trialled it with a dozen new member training schools. Godfrey and I put a document together, which we handed to all the schools and said, 'See how you get on with that'. They came back to us and we could see that it worked. There were a couple of problems. I noticed that people weren't doing everything that we were asking. They were not always following the instructions by showing us that they were aligned with the three principles. So we had to clarify it a little bit.

Well I do wonder if it is a difficult thing to assess. Would there be different interpretations on the applications depending on who did it?

Of course there are interpretations. But the process is surprisingly transparent. The original ones went into a pool on the table and we all looked at them. What happens now is that they come to me, I copy them and send them to Ellen, and we both look at them. We don't compare notes until we have both looked at them and we've never had a disagreement. We have done this with quite a few now and, where we have a question mark over something, we have tended to pick up the same thing. In a case like that, we will go back to the school ask them to clarify. We don't mind what their procedures are as long they are effective and truthful but they have to tell us what they are so we can see and gauge whether they are effective.

It's a very interesting idea that you are trying to assess something without pushing a line or without giving any kind of definite procedure.

There are, now in 2011, over 40 schools. We have always had a couple in America but there is increasing interest over there because they are fed up of the Yoga Alliance, because it's too formulaic. It doesn't offer that breadth. People do want schools and teachers, do want to belong to a Yoga family and they do want their work to have been vouched for by their peers. It gives them confidence. Ideally the yogi is confident out of his own practice but we *are* nevertheless in the marketplace. We are trying to get some kind of symbiosis with the host culture that works in our favour, which enables us to do our work. I see it as an enabling thing for yogis and not as anything that is trying to police them. I don't mind putting what I do on the table and asking my peers to vouch for me. In fact, anybody in the Yoga community can come here. I invite anybody in the Yoga community and see what I do. I really have no qualms about that. It has been quite difficult for people to see that you can do this without having that policing motive.

The one thing that we insist on is that we will never seek any means to make this legally obligatory and we will always oppose that if anybody else tries. It has to be voluntary. My favoured scenario would be that the anarchy of the Yoga scene remains. But given that some people will inevitably go for draconian government regulation in order to gain for themselves some hegemony over the scene, we have to do what we are doing. We need always to understand it as being a simple peer review. I think that anybody with any integrity shouldn't be worried about putting their work in front of their peers.

So what for the future, do you think, for the IYN and for Yoga?

I think the IYN will continue to grow I don't see that in the next five or ten years that its going to lapse into any kind of institutional desire for legal or quasi-legal credibility.

Do you see that in the long term then?

Well, us old farts are going to die, the ones who are radically committed to freedom. And it is an organization and there is a tendency for organizations to fossilise and for revolutions to end in terror. At the moment there are enough people alert to the issues in the core group and there are provisions in the constitution of the IYN and its way of operating. The mode of operation is based on free and frank debate. All these things are protectors against the regulatory and hegemonising impulses of organizations. So I think we have some things in place, which are going to protect it for the foreseeable future both in terms of procedures, personalities, constitution and a core commitment to freedom and a commitment to the idea that a simple registration scheme isn't enough. The organization could technically lapse into what the Yoga Alliance does in America, which is sell registration.

This is why the IYN needed to do more than that. If we were taking the notion seriously that all this was being done to *enable* Yoga, in all its vitality, to circulate in the body politic and to continue developing, then something more needed to happen. It had cultural work to do and it struck me that that work would need to encompass all the different views within the IYN. Our diversity was a tremendous resource that we could all avail ourselves of and have our thinking, our feeling and our practice stimulated by. People needed to be able to hack this debate though, because obviously it's a bit hot. It's a crucible and some people can't hack it, especially if they are committed to fossilised utopian visions and not committed to 'Trotskyite permanent revolution'!

Six years down the line and the IYN has some credibility and authority, but it is unlike the authority that the British Wheel tried to attain by cosying up to the government. It is based on the IYN looking after and defending its members and putting it out there that Yoga is this diverse wild and free animal. So I think it will carry on and it will continue to grow and be vital for a while. What happens after that is up to the next generation. I am no longer the chair of the IYN but I still do a lot of work for the IYN. My thought is, where are the next lot of mavericks and radicals and crazy-wise nutters?

You can't see them then?

I can't just at the moment to be frank apart from a few bright sparks. But I think we will be alright for 10 years or so I really do. I don't agree with some critics that we are going to start bullying everyone next week. I am aware of the problem of institutional organization dynamics. I have studied the matter a lot and over the years have been active in a wide range of organisations from the commune to the trade union. I think we are alright for the minute but I'm talent spotting for the next lot. Having said that, I think in ten years time it won't matter. I think we will have cleared enough space for Yoga to be uncontrollable and very difficult to hegemonize.

How do you think the other players on the scene view the IYN?

Someone said we are a bunch of nutters! Praise indeed. Some people try and propagandise by saying that the IYN's standards aren't very high. In a way I agree; we have *no* standards. In other words, we are not using anything which could be used to *standardise* what Yoga is. In fact, if Yoga ever got standardised, we would be in trouble.

People who call for 'standards' simply reveal their ignorance. Ours are *anti-standards*. We are not into regulation: we are into *irregulation*. Regulation make regular; standards standardise. We are into keeping the irregularity because that is the fertility of Yoga and that places real, fruitful demands on the yogi. The principles that the IYN ask potential members to align with raise the game as far as Yoga culture is concerned, because if you engage with them, they are very juicy and powerful in their affect yet without imposing anything on the yogi. By contrast, the notion of 'standards' is deadening, flattening, restricting. Essentially something experimental is happening in Yoga practice at its best. Yoga is not a finished thing and it never ever can be. It has to recreate itself with every practitioner anew because it is based on experience. It's not like learning all the tort laws or the capital cities of Europe. It has to recreate itself anew and it also has to accommodate itself in every culture in which it finds itself and accommodate on its own best terms. There has never been a society in which it hasn't had to do this despite what some romantics say about ancient India. It had to accommodate the princes and the caste system and all the rest of it. It's never finished and we can never draw the line under it and say, 'This now *is* Yoga'.

If you are going to say anything about Yoga, you have to say that it has a concern for the way human beings connect to infinity. Given that, there is no limit to the amount of expressions it can find. This is a deeper reason why we cannot draw a line under it and it's to do with what it is to be human. Yoga is never finished; it is always an ongoing project. So if we can keep that in mind and emphasise it and if we can preserve enough healthy, creative chaos then it's going to have a chance of doing something political and cultural of very great value.

That seems like a difficult thing to explain to the wider world, perhaps?

Well yes, but if you are a Yoga teacher, you are in the business of showing the wider world that. You invite them through the door and you *show* them.

Or you attempt to.

It's a quixotic thing to attempt. It's a mad thing to attempt and, unless you are really very skilful, it's almost an impossible thing to attempt but nevertheless there it is. That's the game.

Matthew Head