



# Interview with Jawahar Bangerera

**Fernando Garcia**

**Jawahar Bangerera was born in India in 1950. He began practicing yoga in 1969 and has been teaching since 1980. Jawahar teaches workshops all over the world, including Mexico where he has visited every year since 2008. In 2012 he was interviewed by Fernando Garcia Aguinaco, an Iyengar Yoga teacher in Mexico City. Thanks to the kind permission of Fernando, below is an edited transcript of the interview.**

## ***When, how and why did you start practicing yoga?***

From 1964 to 1969 I studied at a boarding school. When I returned home after my schooling was over, my family was taking yoga classes with BKS Iyengar. So it was natural that I was drawn to the practice too. I started in 1969 under the guidance of Guruji.

## ***How did you become a Yoga teacher?***

As a young person when I joined the yoga classes teaching was far from my mind. It never occurred to me that I would teach someday.

But in 1980, one of the students of Guruji, Mister Burzo Taraporewala, contacted me. He taught at the Club Taj Mahal. He approached me one day in April asking if I would replace him as he was going to the United States for three months. I said I would think about it. Later that same week, Guruji visited Mumbai to attend the wedding of the daughter of one of his students. Guruji and several of his students, including me, were dining at the same table. Guruji brought up the subject of teaching. He said, 'This fellow', pointing to Mr. Taraporewala, 'is going to America for three months, why not teach his classes?' So I asked Guruji 'Do you think I am able to teach?' and



Jawahar teaching Adho Mukha Svanasana in the ropes. Photo credit: Fernando Garcia.

he replied 'Yes, you are able to teach.' So I agreed and since Mr. Taraporewala sat at the same table I said, 'Sir, I accept your offer!'

That's how I started. There was no inclination or desire to teach, but the opportunity came my way. Since 1980 I have taught.

#### ***Meanwhile you were in another job?***

Yes, we had a family business. At that time, the yoga classes were taught outside office hours. The morning class was from 7am to 9am, before work. Evening classes were from 6pm to 8pm. So it worked well. My teaching did not interfere with my work.

#### ***How many years later did you decide to work exclusively as a teacher of yoga?***

In 2002 we closed our business. At that time the classes were already underway. So I thought, why don't I just continue teaching? And again by the grace of God it worked. And so I have taught full time since 2002!

#### ***Was it a big change in your life?***

Not really, the transition occurred smoothly. After the close of our business, I just started giving my full attention to the yoga classes.

#### ***There was no sacrifice?***

No. Again, by the grace of God... and of course not only the grace of God, the grace of the guru was also needed. Therefore, everything I've said is due to the grace of God, and also the grace of the guru. Both are important. No one can progress without the grace of God and the grace of the guru.

#### ***How do you feel that the practice of yoga can benefit a community or even in a wider perspective, society?***

One cannot start on a large scale. The individual is part of society. As the individual improves, others follow their example. And this is how it begins to expand. You cannot immediately tell everyone to do yoga.

As a student of yoga you are expected to follow the Yama and Niyama. The Yama (Ahimsa, Satya, Asteya, Brahmacharya and Aparigraha) are for the benefit of society. The Niyama (Shaucha, Samtoshya, Tapas Svadhyayaand Ishvara Pranidhan) are for personal practice and the benefit of the individual.

All you have to do is put these principles into practice. So when you practice, society





benefits, and the whole of humanity benefits. This is how yoga will help to make a difference in society.

***Do you think that asanas help people understand more clearly Yama and Niyama ?***

Yes, just take the example of violence. When you are aggressive in your practice you injure yourself and therefore learn the impact of violence on yourself. Then you do not want to cause violence to others. So the asanas themselves teach: How to be non-violent with yourself, how to be honest with yourself, how not to exceed the energy on one side and have lack of it on another, which leads us to observe asteya, the principle of not stealing. When you work harder on one side, the other side loses energy, equivalent to stealing. Conversely, when energy is confined within you, the energy circulates throughout the body, which teaches an aspect of Brahmacharya, conserving and not allowing the energy to dissipate.

Therefore, the principles of Yama can be learned in the practice of asanas. Gurujii has taught us that if you start by saying 'do not be violent, do not steal, tell the truth' people will not listen. But when they begin the practice of asanas to understand the principles of Yama and Niyama, they become better human beings and begin to transform. Therefore, it is a reverse learning.

In fact, Patanjali says Yama, Niyama and then Asana. This means that to be able to learn the subject of yoga, including asanas, it is expected that the students first practice Yama and Niyama, and then they are qualified to learn asanas.

These days, none of us are qualified for asanas, because we do not follow these principles. But as you begin the asana practice, understanding of the principles of Yama and Niyama follows. It is in reverse. Today no one follows Yama and Niyama but immediately want to do asanas. Students may come to class regardless. We can always correct them, make them understand and so become better citizens. Once again society benefits that way.

***How many classes per week do you recommend for a beginner student?***

For a beginner student I would say that, if possible, take at least two classes, with a rest of two days in between. Thus continuity is maintained. This should continue until the student develops a personal practice.

***And on the personal practice, when do you suggest a student starts their own practice?***

I would say that when the teacher observes that the student is able to understand the asana and how it should be practiced, then it is safe to tell the student to start a personal practice. Beginners do not know what the adjustments or corrections are. They cannot learn this in one class. It will take some months to acquire a sufficient understanding of the basics. Once the basics are understood and the teacher sees this, then fine. Otherwise they could get hurt which only creates a headache for the teacher in the next class.

Or the student hurts themselves and goes directly to the doctor. And the doctor will say 'Do not do yoga.' Chances are that the student will listen to the doctor and not do yoga!



Therefore for personal practice it is better to wait some time, if only for their own safety.

***In your opinion, what is the main purpose of a yoga teacher?***

There are many goals. I recommend reading the articles of Guruji in the book Basic Guidelines For Teachers of Yoga (RIMYI) I think it's the best book on the subject.

Mainly, you must be honest. There must be truth and there must be compassion in teaching. Have the same respect for the student that you would have for yourself.

***And this idea of service?***

If your goal for teaching is for money and profit, you will look at it as a business. Teaching must be service oriented. If you look at it as a service, then you will do a proper service. The money will come. It comes only by grace, the grace of God, the grace of the guru. So you must look at teaching as a noble service. Then you'll do well. The nobility should be there no matter whom you are teaching.

***Why do you enjoy roller coasters so much?***

It's the emotion! On them you experience an emotion. It's like watching a Formula One car even when you do not drive a Formula One car. It's called vicarious satisfaction. Someone is doing something you cannot do. For example, if you do not play tennis, but you derive joy from watching the game, you experience some satisfaction from the seeing. The roller coaster gives some kind of excitement, speed, adventure, sudden and unexpected twists and turns, as in life. Life is also a roller coaster. Sometimes you're up, sometimes you're down. So you can enjoy life in the same way you can enjoy a roller coaster ride!



Fernando and Jawahar (right) enjoying a roller coaster ride. Photo credit: Cynthia Barrera.