MY TURN
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Fighting Demons and Finding Yoga In L.A.

Starring, Satish We've just about had it by now with all that deep trouble in the large Hindu movements which sprung into Western life a decade ago. The demand then was great, the market affluent, and the money came rolling on in. They bought country estates, resort hotels and many acres of land. It didn't take long for the trouble to follow. Rajneeshpuram (in Oregon) became a disaster. The Hare Krishnas got hit hard by lawsuits and bitter in-fighting. Maharishi's TM is caught up in non-transcendental controversy. Siddha Yoga Dham has been through a leadership scandal.

Even all this is nothing compared to the far worse Hindu-Sikh conflicts in North India and the dreadful fighting in Sri Lanka. Chalk up a bunch of victories for the demons! Have commerce and politics again won the day? Is spiritual life once again banished to a never-never land of false hopes and unfulfilled promises?

We like to think that a spiritual hero can win it all by one well-placed blow. There's now a whole army of demons to be fought in a series of battles. So it is in our time. The demons are back on the scene.

So now I would like to bring a certain good news. In Los Angeles alone, in various here-and-there places, a quiet yoga goes on undisturbed, day after day after day. There's no property to make a grab for. There's just the simple studio space. There's no dispute over leaders-there's just this no-nonsense teacher. No siddhis are promised in return for your dollars. There's whatever results steady practice produce.

Bikram's Yoga, in Beverly Hills, is a daily workout, an hour and a half demanding each student's best effort-to the maximum please and hold it there!

Iyengar Yoga, practiced in several around-town locations, is a precise and exacting physical regimen. The body is the field. Work on the body is the purifying path. Progress through the body is a metaphor for spiritual advance.

The kundalini exercises of Yogi Bhajan, taught by black-bearded, white-turbaned Sikhs, call for prolonged pranayamas and intense focus at the third eye.

Chinese yoga, taught by Buddhists and Shaolin temple adepts, requires powerful abdominal development, supple cat-like stretches and full awareness in the present time.

And, yes, for awhile there's always a fight, but this one's within the student himself. He must use rajasic energy ("I'm going to. Yes, I will!") to overcome his own tamasic inertia ("I don't want to. No, I won't. I just can't.") and to achieve sattvic poise ("This!"). His posture becomes puja, his movement prayer. Internal practices then can develop. No time to one-up his fellows. No time to dispute with his teacher. Just practice! There's no discussion.

The Hindu teacher doesn't fight with the Sikh. The Buddhist doesn't fight with the Hindu. Their approaches may differ, for sure, yet Patanjali would applaud them all. Still the restless body! Quiet the restless mind-Yoga chitta vritti nirodha. By steady practice we get this. The demons win only when we don't show up for class.

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