

# The Viniyoga Letter

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## Letter from the President, Sonia Nelson

Dear Friends,

It is eight weeks since my return from India. As I sit on my back porch, the fragrant jasmine of a southern California spring stirs memories of Madras—garlands draped on the women's hair, placed around the necks of stone gods, and hung on my daughter's bedpost ensuring a night of sweet dreams. But mostly, I recall the red and white rose garlands presented to Shri T. Krishnamacharya at public functions—a gesture of respect for the man himself and for the teaching he represented.

It was my honor and privilege to meet with him several times before his death on February 28, 1989. One such meeting stands out, as it gave me an insight into a man whom I had come to regard with some awe and uncertainty. As president of Viniyoga America, I was to participate in an interview with Krishnamacharya. Along with Desikachar, Larry Payne, Mohan (a teacher and student of Krishnamacharya's), and a photographer, I stood expectantly outside the small receiving room awaiting his arrival. When we were ushered in, we found him sitting on a stool wearing a white dhoti and kurta with a striking red and gold shawl—a recent gift for his one-hundredth birthday. It was all very ceremonial.

Having made the appropriate greetings, we offered flowers and an assortment of fresh fruit, part of which he returned to us with his blessings. Desikachar introduced us, explaining who we were and where we were from. Krishnamacharya then presented a formal message to us in Tamil with Desikachar translating.

He spoke for several minutes on the neglected distinction between the yoga that is practiced with the support of the Vedas and that which is not. His voice was strong and authoritative, and even though I understood no Tamil, I knew that what he presented was definitive and complete. There were no pauses to search for words or to reconsider ideas.

Then encouraging Krishnamacharya to respond in English, Desikachar began asking the questions we had previously planned together. Among them was the question of who should practice *vinyasa* (asanas linked together in a flowing sequence and leading to a specific posture). For whom was it appropriate, for example, to do a *vinyasa* leading to *padmasana* (lotus)? To illustrate, Desikachar asked if Mohan should do such a *vinyasa*.

Krishnamacharya began by having his student do certain postures, and it was soon apparent that Mohan was having a problem with his knee. For the next twenty minutes our "interview" became a treatment session for Mohan's knee. Krishnamacharya was diagnosing the difficulty so that he could offer his student the appropriate therapy. Our general question on *vinyasa* was all but forgotten. By having Mohan do a variety of movements from different positions and checking on the resulting degree of pain, and also by asking questions about other physical activities which might influence the problem, Krishnamacharya gathered the necessary information. Subsequently, recommendations were made. These included what to do and what not to do as well as a prescription for herbs to be mixed with oil



Shri T. Krishnamacharya  
1888-1989

and used for massage. After a time, the interview resumed.

But for me, the most significant moments had occurred. Our interview had moved from the general to the particular, from the formal to the personal, showing us both Krishnamacharya the scholar and Krishnamacharya the practitioner. The two were not separate. The transition had unfolded naturally and directly, leaving me with a deepening appreciation for the idea of the *acharya*, the teacher.

Yoga is and will always be the study of a living tradition. Just as the fruit we presented was blessed and returned, the garland of respect which honored the *acharya* shared its sweet fragrance with us all. With the passing of Shri Krishnamacharya, I would like to reaffirm the deep gratitude that I and others feel at having been given the opportunity to further our study of this great tradition with his son, our teacher, T.K.V. Desikachar.