

3 GURUS, 48 QUESTIONS

MATCHING INTERVIEWS WITH

SRI T.K.V. DESIKACHAR, SRI B.K.S. IYENGAR & SRI K. PATTABHI JOIS

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THE HISTORY OF YOGA¹

WHAT IS YOUR THEORY ABOUT THE ORIGINS OF YOGA?

T.K.V. Desikachar: Yoga is from the Vedas.

K. Pattabhi Jois: We cannot know for sure the original nature of yoga, but according to what tradition tells us, Shiva first taught it to Parvati, then Parvati taught it to Shannmuka and Shannmuka taught it to Narada. And the first yoga found before the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali was when Adinatha incarnated in this world to provide yoga as a means to liberating man from the world of suffering. Also yoga is found in the *shastras* [scriptures], in the Bhagavad Gita, and in different Upanishads.

AND HOW IS THIS REFLECTED IN THE SCRIPTURAL, AS WELL AS IN THE LIVING, TRADITION?

Desikachar: There are many references in the Vedas concerning what yoga is. It is referred to not only as *pratyahara* [sensory withdrawal], but, in some Sanskrit passages, it is understood to be the discipline of the senses of the mind. In the Upanishads, yoga is seen as the discipline of controlling the mind, and Patanjali also focuses on the mind, as Vedanta focuses on God.

Pattabhi Jois: In India, tradition is rooted in faith. Without faith, our whole tradition would collapse. And it is the greatness and wisdom of our forefathers that guides us on our path to perfection. To come to realize the depth of their knowledge and wisdom, we need to gain an experience of that to which they testify. This can be very difficult in the times we live in,

but to gain this experience, we need to have faith in what they taught and a willingness to follow their methods with consistent dedication and hard work. It is not easy, but for every *sadhaka* [ardent seeker], there is profound spiritual wisdom to be rediscovered from our tradition. India has a great history of trying to understand the human mind and its theories of *moksa* [release; liberation of soul from further transmigration] are something other religious traditions cannot ignore. Some living teachers are good representatives of our great heritage, while others are less concerned with tradition, and do as they please, making up rules and regulations of their own.

HOW DOES PATANJALI'S CLASSICAL YOGA STAND IN RELATION TO HATHA YOGA?

Desikachar: Hatha yoga is not in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. The term *Hatha yoga* is in the Hatha Yoga Pradipika of Yogi Swatmarama. It is also found in some passages of the Upanishads, but as far as the Yoga Sutras are concerned, there is only one word. And that is not mantra yoga, not Raja yoga, not Laya yoga, not Jnana yoga, but yoga, plain and simple! All other words come from Kriya yoga, and are for an agitated mind that cannot practice yoga. An agitated mind is not free to perceive yoga. For this, one needs mental support or physical stimuli, which Hatha yoga simply acts to provide by preparing the body-mind field to be more fit for such perception.

Pattabhi Jois: Hatha yoga means the



Dattatreya, Guru of all Gurus

union of the opposing energies of the body and the channeling of these energies into the central pathway. And this comes about when the *surya nadi* [right nostril] and *chandra nadi* [left nostril] are controlled, and the vital energy of these two channels merges in the central pathway of the spine. So, when the *prana* is finally at rest and no longer moved by the various sense organs, we then realize God inside. That is our Self, our true identity. So, Hatha yoga is experiencing God inside.

WHO WERE THE ORIGINATORS OF HATHA YOGA?

Desikachar: We don't know if Shiva composed the Vedas or if someone else did. In India, a lot of people compose works that are then ascribed to ancient sources, but nobody knows for certain who really wrote them. It is a tendency in India to mythologize

¹These interviews were originally conducted in the early months of 2004 in Mysore, Pune, and Madras, as part of a master's thesis. The full thesis runs to some 55,000 words, a generous portion of which is made up of the interviews, which appear here in abridged and edited form. For clarity's sake, answers have been grouped together according to questions asked, rather than to their order in the original talks. Additionally, there are a few instances in the thesis when brief quotes from books by the interviewees have been added to their answers to help clarify ideas or to fill in indecipherable gaps on the interview tapes. These have been retained and footnoted. Not all interviewees, of course, answered each and every question, preferring occasionally to pass a particular one over. Mr. Medin's work is currently being expanded into a book.

and to ascribe materials to ancient founders to make them more authentic. Even my father, Krishnamacharya, invented parts of his teaching. I know that he wrote down several passages in his early life which he changed in his later life. He also authored works himself, much like, in ancient times, ancient scholars would do and then never acknowledge that they had done so. Divine intervention or not [laughs], these scholars always claimed that texts were by some superhuman being rather than themselves. So, naturally, they would say that Shiva was the composer because Shiva is a supernatural being, rather than just an ordinary individual. And, yes, of course, they talked about subtleties and superhuman powers, but we don't know how they perceived this. We have to rely on textual evidence and can only assume that there was an esoteric teaching running parallel with their texts. Subtleties such as the *nadis* [nerve pathways] and various energy channels are mentioned in the Upanishads and it is evident that these people had an insight into them, but it is not easy for us to understand where they derived their knowledge from. Like Shankaracharya, for example, who said he learned everything from Gaudapada. But who was Gaudapada? That's why they say, *gurubhyo param apnoti*, which means a person's clarity should highlight his teacher, not himself. One should never tell anybody where a mantra was received from. Instead, one should only speak of the guru, never of the mantra. That's the universal law.

Pattabhi Jois: I don't know for certain. I only know what my guru taught me. But many texts mention the *rishis* Matsyendranath, Goraknath, Vamana, but before them, there were other *maharishis*. Yoga is at least two to three thousand years old, if not older.

WHAT DISTINGUISHES HATHA YOGA FROM OTHER PHYSICAL FITNESS EXERCISES?

Desikachar: According to various texts, “*ha*” means the *surya nadi* and “*tha*” means the *chandra nadi*. When these two energy channels, *ha* and *tha*, merge together in the *sushumna* [spinal nadi], there is a complete understanding of

Hatha yoga. Hatha also means power or force, but whatever the interpretation, I believe that the union of these two major *nadis* produces a harmonizing influence on the body and hence allows us to experience yoga.

Pattabhi Jois: [Laughs] Yoga is not physical—very wrong! Hatha yoga can, of course, be used as external exercise only, but that is not its real benefit. Yoga can go very deep and touch the soul of man. When it is performed in the right way, over a long period of time, the nervous system is purified, and so is the mind. As the Bhagavad Gita is telling us.

*Yatato hyapi Kaunteya
purshasya vipashcitah
indriyani pramathini haranti
prasabham manah*

*Tani sarvani samyamya yukta asita
matparah*

*Vase hi yasyendriyani tasya prajna
pratishtita BG 2:60-61*

[Controlling all the senses, the self-controlled one should sit meditating on Me. Verily, his wisdom is steady whose senses are under control. The turbulent senses, O son of Kunti, forcibly lead astray the mind of even the struggling wise person.]

The whole purpose of Hatha yoga is to purify and control our senses. It is the ultimate science of helping us discover what lies behind the apparent reality of body and mind. But look at the world today! There are so many different ways of doing yoga. Everybody says that they are doing it the right way, but what is the right way unless it produces a certain change in people, unless a certain energy is awakened within them? As Swatmarama is telling us, in the last verse of the Hatha Yoga Pradipika:

*Yavan naiva pravishati caran maruto
madhyamarge*

*Yavad bindur na bhavati drdaprana
vata prabandhat |*

*Yavad dhyane sahasadrsham jaayate
nanva tattvam*

*Tavaj jnanam vadati tadidam
dambhamthyapralapah ||*

HYP 4:113

[Until the prana enters and flows in the middle channel and the breath becomes firm by the control of the movements of prana; and until the mind assumes the form of Brahma without any effort in contemplation, up to then, all talk of knowledge and wisdom is merely the nonsensical babblings of a mad man.]

So, we must follow the method that is correct and practice it for a long time. *Sa tu dirgha kala nairantarya satkara sevito dridhabhumih* [A practice over a long period of time, consistently, humbly, with the best intention, becomes the firm foundation for cultivating a cessation of the fluctuations of the mind.] This can take many lifetimes of practice—even 100,000 years!

KRISHNAMACHARYA

CAN YOU DESCRIBE KRISHNAMACHARYA IN THREE WORDS?

Desikachar: One word: *acharya* [spiritual teacher]. That is enough!

B.K.S. Iyengar: He was a versatile man, an extraordinary man—not of a normal kind. I revered him. He was the master of many subjects. It is hard to find people nowadays with knowledge like his. And how men of our low intellect can speak of a person like him, I don't know!

Pattabhi Jois: A very good man, a strong character. A dangerous man.

WHAT DO YOU KNOW OF KRISHNAMACHARYA'S LINEAGE AND TEACHERS?

Desikachar: You can refer to this in the book covering Krishnamacharya's life published by our institute.

Iyengar: As far as I know, his teacher was Ramamohan Brahmachari of Nepal, but we didn't speak much about his guru in detail. I knew Krishnamacharya because he married my sister in the nineteen-thirties. What he did before that, I am not too familiar with. But it is certain that, due to his being a great Sanskrit scholar, he met a lot of ancient scholars in India who introduced him to Ramamohan Brahmachari. According to legend, Krishnamacharya studied

with him for seven years. But I don't want to create any false ideas about what happened. I only came to know him after my sister's marriage and, by that time, he was a remarkable yogi.

Pattabhi Jois: His teacher was Ramamohan Brahmachari, a very good man, a strong man, who taught Krishnamacharya many things. All my information comes from my guru and he told me that he studied with him for close to seven years. When he finished his studies, his teacher told him to go and teach yoga, so he left and started giving demonstrations and teaching in various places around India. That is how I met him for the first time in Hassan in 1927.

HOW LONG DID YOU STUDY WITH KRISHNAMACHARYA?

Desikachar: For twenty-nine years. When I look back at my notes, I think to myself, 'Wow! What a remarkable man!'

Iyengar: I studied with him for two years when I was fourteen, fifteen years old. When I was seventeen, I went to Pune and, every year thereafter, I would go and show my respect and reverence for him. During that two-year period, he only taught me for about ten or fifteen days, but those few days determined what I have become today!

Pattabhi Jois: I studied with him from 1927 to 1953. The first time I saw him was in November of 1927. It was at the Jubilee Hall in Hassan and, the next day, I found out where he lived and went to his house. He asked me many questions, but finally accepted me and told me to come back the next morning. Then, after my thread ceremony in 1930, I went to Mysore to learn Sanskrit and was accepted at the Maharaja's Sanskrit College. There, I was reunited with Krishnamacharya in 1931, when he came to do a demonstration. He was very happy to find me studying at the college.

WHAT DID KRISHNAMACHARYA TEACH YOU?

Desikachar: I cannot even begin to tell you what I learned from my father. He was such a great man! Hatha yoga, *pranayama* [fourth limb of Ashtanga

yoga], the Baghavat Gita, the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, the Upanishads, various books on Vedanta, Samkhya Yoga Karika—every good book ever written about yoga. And not just once! He taught them all many times over. And then there was Ayurveda and Vedic chanting, and how to perform rituals properly, how to do *pujas* [homage to and worship of a deity], how to do cremations, how to perform marriages, how to do all kinds of rites of passage. He also taught me how to perform the rites when somebody dies. My father simply taught me everything about ancient rituals in India! And everything he taught me was in Sanskrit, of course. In 1984, when he was ninety-six years old, I asked him "What is your experience of yoga?" And he said; "Today, faith in God is the most important thing for yoga." Faith in God is the quickest way to reach God.

Iyengar: He only taught me a few *asanas*, and then my evolution came from my own practice.

Pattabhi Jois: What my teacher taught me is exactly the same method I am teaching today. It was an examination course of primary, intermediate, and advanced *asanas*. He also taught me philosophy. For five years, we studied the great texts. He would call us to his house and we would stand outside and wait to be called in. Sometimes, we would wait the whole day. He would usually teach us for one or two hours every day: *asanas* early in the morning and, around 12 o'clock, philosophy class. He also taught us *pranayama*, *pratyahara* [sensory withdrawal], *dharana* [concentration], and *dhyana* [meditation]. And, in addition to the Yoga Sutras and Bhagavad Gita, he also taught Yoga Vasishta, Yoga Yajnavalkya, and Samhita. And all in Sanskrit.

COULD YOU DESCRIBE KRISHNAMACHARYA'S TEACHING METHODS?

Desikachar: What was so great about my father was that he taught differently as a young man, when he was in Mysore and teaching my uncle and Pattabhi Jois. Then, he taught in one style, but

later on, he changed and began to teach people differently. He began to cater to the needs of the individual, rather than to teach everyone in the same way. He also became a healer of old people. When he taught Muslims, he would quote passages from the Koran and ask them to face towards Mecca, and when Bengalis came, he would teach them in Bengali. His teaching methodology also evolved, which meant that he reduced and adapted it to the needs of individuals, to their culture and mentality. It was not standardization of the "everyone-has-to-do-this-asana" variety. First, he would connect to an individual, get to know their background, their religion, their culture, whether they were a woman or a man; he taught women and men differently. But even though he taught people differently, he was still able to reach everybody he would teach, young or old. He was an orthodox Brahmin and, at the same time, invited people to his home for coffee and breakfast. He would always feed and look after the people he taught. So, it wasn't only about the teaching method, but about him as a human being caring for another human being.

Iyengar: In the early days, he was like a militant. He was a fierce, harsh man. As long as I knew him, he was always very harsh and strict. He may have been good to others and other people may speak of him as a kind, loving man, but I never experienced anything other than a very, very strong, demanding individual.

Pattabhi Jois: Very strict. If you came one minute early or one minute late, you would not be allowed into class. He demanded total discipline and was very, very tough. People were fearing him, but he had a very good heart.

DID IT EVER CHANGE?

Desikachar: My father's teaching changed as he went through different periods of his life. Before India gained its independence, it was different. In 1930, my father wrote a book on Vedic chanting in which he said that women were unsuited for Vedic practice and should marry before puberty. In 1986, he said that women must learn Vedic chanting and that they were the

upholders of *dharma* [duty; ethics]. And this when he was ninety-seven years old and even though he was a strict Brahmin and well-versed in the Purva Mimamsa school.

Iyengar: I would say probably not, which is why some confusion has developed because what I think his method was may be different from what somebody else thinks. But what I'm teaching came from my guru, though I developed it further myself. What I teach is Krishnamacharya's honest method. Everyone, of course, wants to prove their authenticity with respect to Krishnamacharya. When Desikachar became his student, he wasn't even studying yoga. He was working in a company and was supposed to go to northern India, but suddenly took a great interest in his father, who was then seventy. Of course, the difference between a person's practice when he is seventy and when he is young is quite remarkable. And, naturally, the teachings he would pass on would be quite different. But my style is from the seed he planted in Mysore. It is also from challenges that came up in my own practice and from the need to adapt to people and their needs. I had to question the jumping and *vinyasas* [synchronized movements and breath] and see what they were. You know, Pune is known for its wrestlers. There is in India no spiritual and cultural center like Maharashtra, and Pune itself was the intellectual Cambridge of India. Now, if you mix this with the famous wrestlers that were here, you can naturally understand why I had to question my yoga tradition and to find out what was particular to it. What was the difference between the physical practice I was doing and the practice of the wrestlers? On what level was it different from normal physical exercise? At first, they would appear to be identical. So, this opened my eyes to really find out what yoga had, particularly with reference to its influence on the body and, most importantly, to its impact on the mind. So, I cultivated this, but the reason for my growth was my guru, though my later development was due to my own hard work. And evolution is evolution,

thank God. What Pattabhi Jois was taught in 1934, he is still teaching now. I'm not saying this is wrong—I also taught it—but the people I talked to said it was nothing but physical movement, callisthenic-style. But now, today, the very same method is spiritual, according to some people. I don't understand the mentality of humans. But what is important is how we may develop the dormant consciousness within the body, how we may penetrate from this end to that. As I've said, how do you understand *trikonasana* on the right leg? By expanding down into the left leg. In a similar way, I needed to find out what the depth of each *asana* is and how it works in opposition. I needed to find the bone of the right leg in opposition to the left. Do you know how to elongate it? Is the energy on the right leg equal to that on the left leg? Is the energy straight on the bank of the outer leg? So, these were all the things I had to discover. So, intelligence had to go into how to penetrate the postures to make sense of them. It is not just gymnastics or callisthenic-style—that is not what *vinyasa* is about. *Vinyasa* can be different from gymnastics, but then you have to develop it intellectually. And that is what I did. I brought the refinement, but the foundation was from my guru, who provided me with the base that I grew out of.



Pattabhi Jois: I don't know. As long as I was with him, he always taught the same.

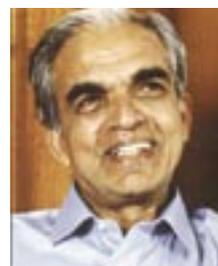
DID KRISHNAMACHARYA TEACH EVERYBODY THE SAME WAY?

Iyengar: No, which is why there is all this confusion. Even the intellectuals of the world are just like intellectual Hitlers, trying to prove who is most right. They talk in such a way as to confuse and try to build up their intellectual purity to impose their views.

But they create nothing but confusion. Thank God I came up and developed my own confidence. The one thing is discipline—that is essential—and that is what attracted me to the practice—to inquire, to try to understand, and to explore what there is in the *asanas*. My guru's mentality was that he was always centered. Even when he walked down the street, he would never sway; he was always centered within himself and wouldn't look to the right or the left, even if there was commotion or noise.

Pattabhi Jois: Yes.

WHAT WAS SO SPECIAL ABOUT KRISHNAMACHARYA?



Desikachar: He was not just a yoga teacher. Whatever India represents, whether Ayurveda, yoga, Mimamsa, or the various schools of Vedanta, I have never seen anybody, any single individual, who had such knowledge. When he was ninety-seven, he could lecture on anything. You see, it was not only about the *asanas*. The yoga my father embodied was manifold. I always thought of him as a circle, as completely stable, and as somebody for whom yoga was simply secondary. He advised people about many things, about farming—he knew how to grow crops—about how to choose a house, about medical things, about affairs of the heart. He was also a great cook and even taught my mother how to cook.

Iyengar: He was a great healer. He had the *mantra-jaya* [the power of the mantra] and was not just a great scholar, but had the divine grace working through him. And that divine grace is something neither you nor I can even imagine. No, it was greater than that: I saw him act as a physician and help people in matters that were unbelievable. He was a divine healer. I even think that the mantras he helped some people with had more effect

than the yoga. He had the power of the mantra—I don't know how, but he certainly had it—and he had the *siddhi* [superhuman power], but it intoxicated him. It really intoxicated my guru, I know that. He was also a good reader of human psychology. He could look at a man and tell the exact character of his personality. He could see beyond the appearance of things.

Pattabhi Jois: He was not just a great yoga teacher, but also a great Sanskrit scholar. He had studied and completed his examination in all the six *darshanas* [schools of ancient Hindu philosophy]. He was known as Mimamsa Tirtha [ford across the river of human misery], Vedanta Vagisa [lord of speech], Sankhya Yoga Shikhamani [jewel among Brahmins].

WHY DO YOU THINK KRISHNAMACHARYA BECAME SUCH A LEGEND?

Desikachar: I don't know that he is such a legend, but thank you for saying so. My father never cared for name and fame. And here in India, a lot of people don't know him. If you ask most people who the source of yoga is, they will say Iyengar. Nobody knows Krishnamacharya, the great originator of modern yoga! It's a shame. But I am very, very proud of my father.

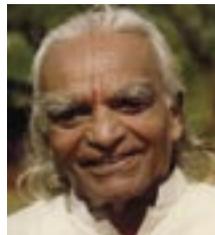
Iyengar: He was the founder of the modern developments of yoga. Because of his grace, the most recent advancement of yoga came forth. He was the giver of the path, but each man would also have to come to know the subject for himself as he engaged with it. In 1960, nobody knew my guru. When I brought out my book and showed my respect for him, everybody started saying, "Oh, there is this Krishnamacharya!"² It's the human mentality to always have to look for a better knower, to think that somebody else is the better knower of the method. But that is not important. What is important is that things evolve, things change. But for the human mentality, it's different. 'Desikachar? Pattabhi Jois?' it says. 'Maybe they are the better knowers?' But we all studied with Krishnamacharya. We were all given the seeds by him to evolve yoga further. We cannot speak of a better knower. We all

studied with him at different periods of our lives. And what he was in those early days was a strict disciplinarian. People can't even imagine the way he was! You could not say one word against him—people could not open their mouths against him. What he said was law and everybody had to follow. If he told you to finish at a particular time, you had to finish exactly then. If he told you to do something, you had to do exactly that. Nobody could question him. My guru's character was like that of the crazy-wise Tibetan adept Milarepa—my guru was exactly the same. And the encounters between Milarepa and Marpa were probably the same as the encounters between Krishnamacharya and his students!

Pattabhi Jois: Because of his knowledge and wisdom.

WHAT WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING KRISHNAMACHARYA TAUGHT YOU?

Desikachar: The most important thing my father taught me was humility. *Vidya dadhatu vinaya* [teach knowledge with humility].



Iyengar: What he thought me was only a few *asanas*. That seed was what he gave me and I developed it as well as I could. The seed was very good, which is why I could grow. And whatever he gave me, I simply refined and developed, and whatever he taught me, that's what I developed too. Evolution came later: how to progress, how to improve the postures, what to do in a correct way. He never taught me much about teaching, but he saw me teach. In 1961, he came to Pune and was teaching my daughter and son. He taught them for many hours, but unfortunately they could not get what he was trying to show them. When I came up and asked what was wrong, my daughter told me what she did not understand about a posture. So, I explained to

her, "You must stretch from this end to that end." And immediately when Krishnamacharya saw this, he gave me a gold medal known as Yoga Shikshaka Chakravarti, which means "Emperor of Yoga Teachers, Teacher of Teachers." He said I must teach like this and not just in private, but in public. He said I must become a yoga teacher and pushed me definitely in that direction. He also had remarkable skills for understanding the human psyche and that's probably the greatest thing he ever taught me.

Pattabhi Jois: When he left for Madras he told me, "Make this yoga method the work of your life."

DO YOU KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT HIS PERSONAL PRACTICE?

Desikachar: He would get up at 3 o'clock in the morning, read his books, and then practice.

Iyengar: He did lots of *pranayama* and a little *asana*. I became the master of *asana* and he was the master of *pranayama*. I saw him do *shirshasana*, *padmasana*, *sarvangasana*, but it appeared to me that *asanas* were no longer that important to him. He used to do what we call *aradhana*, which means prayer. For more than three hours every morning, he would sit in front of an idol and do various rituals, *parayanas* [recitation of the names of God], and prayers. He was a free man at the time, under the patronage of the Maharaja, and he devoted more time to spiritual practice.

Pattabhi Jois: No, only that he was a master at what he was doing.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR OWN PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH KRISHNAMACHARYA?

Desikachar: I saw my father as my father. He was a very disciplined man, loving, caring, but at the same time, a strict disciplinarian.

Iyengar: I told you I revered him. Although he was my guru, he was also my brother-in-law. I never called him "guruji" at all, but called him, in our language, *tambi* [brother]. In my heart of hearts though, he was my guru. Physically, he was my brother-in-law, but mentally, he was my guru.

Pattabhi Jois: A normal guru-*sisya* [disciple] relationship.

² *Light on Yoga* (New York: Schocken Books, 1966).

DID YOU EVER GET TO KNOW HIM PERSONALLY? WHAT KIND OF PERSON WAS HE?

Desikachar: We lived together until he died, so of course I got to know him personally.

Iyengar: Of course, I knew him personally. I lived with him at his place, so naturally I got to know him. I knew him for what he was then—a terrible dictator in Mysore. How people later came to talk of him as a soft-spoken, mellow man living in Madras, I don't know. But he probably got mellow after he had to give up the patronage of the Maharaja, when India became independent. Since the Maharaja had no money, he told Krishnamacharya, "It's up to the government now to look after you and the yoga *shala* [hall]." But the government, of course, had no money for yoga *shalas*, so Krishnamacharya probably came to the realization that the temperament he'd had under the Maharaja wasn't going to work. Whether this is true or not, I don't know, but after he came to Madras, things definitely changed with his teaching. He was a master in Mysore, but he had to become a servant in Madras. Now, he suddenly had to look after people and that is probably why some of his teaching methods changed.

Pattabhi Jois: Dangerous, but kind. Proud, but very knowledgeable.

YOGA TODAY

CAN WESTERNERS EVER DO JUSTICE TO THE GREAT HERITAGE OF YOGA?

Desikachar: I think there are certain losses, but I am very inspired by the dedication of Westerners, as well as by the care and concern of some people. This makes me very confident, though at the same time, I know yoga has become a business, money, etc. This is even happening in India. Even so, there are some genuine teachers out there. And for me, as an Indian, the West is a role model that I have great faith in. The wind blows from the West here and I am very happy about this because some of the greatest people I have met have come from the West. And my hope is that yoga masters in the East and West,

whatever form of yoga they teach, can transform yoga. It shouldn't just be men in India. But the spirit of yoga speaks for itself. We can see this now in the healing field. What is so fantastic, what is so significant, is that people are opening up to the healing benefits of yoga. Even doctors in the medical field are coming to our center these days. But yoga is also a relationship, not a mass movement. It is a one-to-one relationship between people, not commercialization. What happens in the West is broad generalizations and informational teaching, and there is little personal contact, unfortunately. And students really must know the value of personal relationships.

Iyengar: What is interesting to see is that there was no respect or awareness of yoga when I first came to the West in 1960. And then gradually, as I started to do some demonstrations, the awareness began to grow. And I have given more than 10,000 demonstrations, three hours long—you can ask anybody! This style of direct presentation, which I developed, cultivated an interest in people. And it wasn't spiritual things—not saying that, by doing such and such, they would get certain benefits—no, it was those direct presentations of mine that attracted people. And now, fifty years of yoga in the West have caused yoga to grow and evolve. But I took it to the masses. I never kept it a secret. Yes, I did teach famous people like Yehudi Menuhin and Krishnamurti, but having taught them, I realized that everybody needs yoga, regardless of their background. There are human qualities in ordinary men and one doesn't have to be a philosopher or a special man to have your human potential brought out. So, I brought yoga to the people and now the seeds that I planted carry on. Yoga lives. It may go on for centuries. But I don't think the subject of yoga is something that belongs to me. It is something that continues to live within individuals. Yes, there were many *maharishis* and great people of the past, but the yoga that we come to now is what we have and that is what lives within us.

Pattabhi Jois: Yoga is very good if it is taught with the correct method.

Unfortunately, a lot of Westerners are thinking more about making money than about teaching this correct method. And I don't know how beneficial that can be for people. When yoga is only for business, it is of no use. People offer fifteen-day courses, even one-week courses, to become a yoga teacher. [Laughs] How good for yoga that is, I don't know.

WHAT HAS THE WESTERN WORLD CONTRIBUTED TO YOGA?

Desikachar: I am very grateful to the West. They've reminded us Indians about our great heritage.

Iyengar: Any Western yoga teacher who teaches with sincerity and is properly trained by a qualified practitioner contributes something good to the world of yoga.

Pattabhi Jois: Nobody can contribute anything to yoga, but yoga can contribute something to everybody.

HOW IS THE WESTERN MENTALITY DIFFERENT FROM THE INDIAN?

Desikachar: What I like about Westerners is their questioning minds. In India, people never ask why they should do this or that, they just do it on blind faith. They don't question anything—"why are you telling me this? why should I do that?"—they never ask these things. I used to question my father and he was so happy when I did. Questioning is important as it is the key to finding out for yourself. Sincerity and love, of course, also need to be there. Younger people are better at questioning these days, but before it was taboo. People say "guruji," which is like a slogan we have eulogized. But I believe people have slaughtered "guruji" with false pretences.

Iyengar: Mentally, a few differences exist between Westerners and Indians. Westerners try to solve their emotional problems intellectually, but emotional problems need to be solved emotionally, not logically. Westerners developed their system of logic and Indians developed their system of reason. When logic and reason mix together, then humanity can grow. In the West, we see vertical growth and, in India, we see horizontal growth, but when vertical and horizontal intelligence are able to work together,

I believe in the full potential of human development.

Pattabhi Jois: Indian people are used to following tradition, to having faith in the system, and to believing in *moksha*, or liberation. But for Western people, *moksha* is not very important. They practice yoga primarily for their health, which is okay. But to really understand the heritage of India, one must also understand its ancient traditions, which gave rise to our spiritual tradition. Some Westerners overlook this great heritage and have no idea what the roots of yoga are.

IS THERE ANY DANGER THAT THE YOGA TRADITION COULD BE DILUTED?

Desikachar: It is already being diluted. My father studied with Ramamohan Brahmachari for eight-and-a-half years. He was dedicated and worked closely with his teacher every day. I've also visited Muktinath in Nepal, and the sacrifices people have to make there just to get up early in the morning, when it is cold, are immense. For a normal person, it is of course difficult to get up early to pursue their dedication to yoga, but it all depends on the commitment and intentions of the mind. But the physical side is not the end of yoga. The physical side is only one aspect. Yoga should not be learned by the performance of postures. If you go by the performance of postures, then you dilute yoga, but if you go by the inquiry of the spirit, it is not diluted.

Iyengar: Dilution is, of course, a danger. But dilution of any subject is the death of that subject, but not of humanity. Please note the difference. If an art dies, what good does that do humanity? Yoga lives through humanity. As long as there are ardent seekers, I'm confident that the beauty of yoga will survive.

Pattabhi Jois: Yes, if people don't appreciate and take care of the great teachings that have come down to us.

SOME PEOPLE SPEAK OF PHYSICAL YOGA, MENTAL YOGA, SPIRITUAL YOGA. IS THERE A DIFFERENCE?

Desikachar: Yoga is a relationship. It is not that the body is not important—the body is very important; it is the temple—but a transformation in the

body cannot happen without a good relationship with the mind. Whatever happens in the body affects the mind and whatever happens in the mind affects the body. And whatever happens in the emotional body affects the mind, as well. But the essence of yoga is often not taught through the body. What is essential and needs to be taught is the spirit of yoga, and that people don't understand.

Iyengar: Refer to my books and CD. *Asanas* are not meant for physical fitness, but for conquering the elements, energy, and so on. So, how to balance the energy in the body, how to control the five elements, how to balance the various aspects of the mind without mixing them all together, and how to be able to perceive the difference between the *gunas* [qualities], and to experience that there is something behind them, operating in the world of man—that is what *asanas* are for. The process is slow and painstaking, but a steady inquiry facilitates a growing awareness.

Pattabhi Jois: Yoga is one. God is one. Yoga means *sambandaha*, which is *atma manah samyogah*, or knowing God inside you. But using it only for physical practice is no good, of no use—just a lot of sweating, pushing, and heavy breathing for nothing. The spiritual aspect, which is beyond the physical, is the purpose of yoga. When the nervous system is purified, when your mind rests in the *atman* [the Self], then you can experience the true greatness of yoga.

WHY IS YOGA SO BENEFICIAL FOR MANKIND?

Desikachar: I started yoga because my father helped a lady from India who had hardly slept for thirty years and I saw the effect. After that, I thought that I had to learn this from him and then I just started seeing in what ways yoga really helps people. Yoga is not for everybody, but for those who experience it and are touched by it, it transforms their lives. They can connect with a spirit beyond themselves that elevates them above many difficulties. I won't say that every *asana* will save people. I won't say that standing on your head is good for everybody, but the inner spirit that yoga awakens is beneficial.

That's what Patanjali refers to. A lot of people have lost their inner confidence, their strength, and what yoga does is bring this out, which strengthens them again. Awakening this inner confidence is why it is beneficial to humanity. It is our inner strength that helps us endure our difficulties and lifts us through our various trials. And it is this same strength that helps us embrace life in a better way. This is the strength that Patanjali calls *chiti-shakti*.

Iyengar: Yoga is a self-critiquing subject. Only a yogi can criticize himself. A musician, a physiologist or other scientist criticizes their respective subjects, but only a practitioner can come to grips with the Self through



his own practice. Through self-study and self-criticism, he develops his own intelligence and learns to discriminate between what is real and what is not. As the Self grows in him, he comes to understand. The Self alone shines forth and permeates all his activities. That is why yoga is beneficial to mankind because its practitioners may come to understand the Self. It is a development from the gross to the subtle, but we must always start with the gross—that is our point of departure. What better thing can you do in this life than to get to know your own Self?

Pattabhi Jois: Yoga is good for man because the physical body improves, the nervous system improves, the mind improves, the intellect improves—so, how can yoga not be good?

WHAT ARE YOUR PERSONAL VIEWS ON ALL THE MODERN SCHOOLS OF YOGA IN THE WEST TODAY?

Desikachar: My view is that if people can benefit from something, fine!

Iyengar: I am a yogi. I will not say anything about other schools. I can only refer to the Mahabharata, which tells us about Dharmaraja and Duryodhana. Dharmaraja was a righteous man and Duryodhana was a cruel man, but both of them were present. So, when both good and bad are present, how can I answer? How can I say what is good or bad? People will find what they are looking for.

Pattabhi Jois: Let other forms of yoga be there, I teach only Ashtanga yoga, which is real. I know that it is real and everybody who practices it correctly will come to know that it is real also. The essence of yoga is to reach oneness with God. The ego must be understood, contemplated, and released. If you only try to boost the ego, you will miss the greatest fruit of yoga.

IS IT OKAY TO CAPITALIZE ON YOGA? IS YOGA AS A BUSINESS ACCEPTABLE?

Desikachar: Well, this happens with everything. We are human beings and we have certain drawbacks. We have to accept them.

Iyengar: Capitalizing on yoga means commercial yoga and that is not right. But it is the human mentality. The world is like that—“How can I become famous?” “How can I become rich?” And, unfortunately, some people will always take advantage of others. Take for example the instruments I developed. How many centers are there around the world that sell these instruments? Everybody uses them, though I don't get anything for them. But I don't mind that either. You see, I'm happy because millions of people have benefited from the advantages of yoga. Without the

instruments, some people wouldn't be able to practice at all, so they help them on their way.

Pattabhi Jois: That is the way of Westerners. They are always thinking to make more money. Unfortunately, it is not good when the goal of yoga is money rather than God. Real yoga is not about money. If yoga comes your way, be happy about it. People ask me so many questions: “Guruji, what should I do about this? How should I do that?” I say, “Don't take your mind other places. Think only of God, then do yoga.” Let things come. If you want to benefit, think only of God, dedicate all your actions to God, and whatever comes your way is a gift—is His gift to you.

ON TEACHING

WHAT ARE THE QUALITIES OF A GOOD YOGI?

Desikachar: My model is my father.

Iyengar: How can you ask a question like that? I will tell you in one sentence: The lunatic speaks loudly, you and I speak internally, and the wise yogi speaks not at all. The wise yogi is silent.

Pattabhi Jois: Dedication to yoga and a steady faith in yoga. And a willingness to do hard work and to continuously think of and concentrate on yoga.³

WHAT MAKES A GOOD YOGA TEACHER?

Desikachar: A good yoga teacher has to be an example, not just an entertainer. You see, it is not the strength or beauty of an *asana* practice that makes a great yoga teacher. It is how they are as individuals.

Iyengar: A good teacher is one who comes to the level of people and builds them up. He understands where they are, what their position is. This is the right approach for a good teacher to take. I do not demand, but earn respect.

Pattabhi Jois: Primarily, you have to learn the practice properly, you have to know yoga properly, before you can start to teach. If you think, ‘I want to become a teacher,’ before you have a

good understanding, that is not good. You need to be a student for many, many years. It is important to have a good teacher to guide you and then, when your teacher thinks you are ready, you can start to teach.

WHAT ARE THE CRITERIA TO BECOME A GOOD YOGA TEACHER?

Desikachar: Faith in God. Let me tell you about Sri Dharan, my colleague. He used to work as the manager of a bank. He had no desire to move further with his job and, when he retired, he approached me and offered his services here. He joined our organization as our head, but did not want any money. He could have made a fortune as a business administrator in a bank, but he chose to work here, for the service of yoga. That is commitment, and I believe that is what makes a great teacher.

Iyengar: One has to work really hard and show the qualities of sincerity, honesty, and virtue. It is the responsibility of human beings to move and act in truly honorable ways and, as Patanjali said, to develop the qualities of friendliness, compassion, gladness, and endless love. When we embody these four qualities, we can begin to approximate the criteria of becoming a good teacher.

Pattabhi Jois: As I said, be a dedicated student for many years before you even start to think about teaching

IS THERE AN ELEMENT IN YOGA THAT CAN NEVER BE TAUGHT?

Desikachar: Yes. That is why the Yoga Sutras say that a yoga teacher is like a farmer. He is not the seed, the soil, or the water, but the farmer who cultivates the land for the growth that is there. A farmer can break the dam so that the water flows, but what happens next is not in the hands of the seed alone. It is a mixture of the cultivation of the land, the watering of the field, and the preparation of the soil. Similarly, one can strive hard to teach the various elements of yoga correctly, but the fate of the practitioner is in the hands of God. One can only help the process along.

³At this point in the interview, Sharath Rangaswamy, assistant director of the Ashtanga Yoga Research Institute in Mysore and Sri K. Pattabhi Jois's grandson, joined the conversation. He had much to say in answer to the questions about teaching and many of his words have been incorporated into Pattabhi Jois's own answers on the subject. The decision to include his words reflects his very close relationship with his grandfather—he is a life-long student of his—and the strength of his English.

Iyengar: Once you have reached realization, the teaching ends. When the seeker becomes the seer, the teaching stops. This is the highest teaching. As long as there is a difference between guru and student, teaching is needed. But when the difference between the two disappears, then they become one. So, the greatest teacher teaches the student how to attain the level of realization that he himself has reached.

Pattabhi Jois: Only your guru can truly guide you—only someone who has studied the path before you and is aware of all the dangers can truly direct you. And the blessing of the guru is very important too. Without the guru's blessing, you cannot really progress as a student. And this blessing is to listen to the guru, to what the correct method is, and to have faith in him—to follow and let yourself be guided by him. This blessing cannot be explained. It can only be experienced with the energy and strengths that will flow from within you. This strength from within you will make you firmer, more secure, and stronger.

WHAT IS UNIQUE TO YOUR STYLE OF YOGA?

Desikachar: It is not a style. It is not a method. It is not Vini yoga. We never use Vini yoga. Those who do, do it for the purpose of business. I have told people that if they do Vini yoga, not to use my name. So, those who come here don't come to practice the Vini yoga style, they come to see me.

Iyengar: Let my students answer that. They see me.

Pattabhi Jois: What is particular to Ashtanga yoga practice is what we call *vinyasa*, which brings together breathing with physical movement. Each posture is connected with a certain breathing sequence, which comes before and after it. This keeps the flow of energy through the spine open. It also safeguards against injury and prevents energy from stagnating in the body. *Vinyasa* purifies the body, the nervous system, and cultivates the proper energetic field in the body. It

is essential to yoga, we believe, and gives people a direct inner experience of their potential. To feel the energy continually flowing through the spine is the effect of *vinyasa*. But there is nothing that comes instantly. One needs to practice this system for many years—a minimum of five to ten years—to begin to experience these deep subtle changes in the body.

HAVE YOUR TEACHING METHODS CHANGED OVER THE YEARS? DO YOU FOCUS ON THINGS NOW THAT YOU DIDN'T WHEN YOU FIRST STARTED?

Desikachar: What I learned from my father was to sit on the floor and to say some prayers—that is what I teach people. My country is changing fast, as you know. We have to adapt ourselves to the context and circumstances we live in, and we need to be aware of what's happening. The importance of yoga is *viveka*, or discrimination in action. It is not performance. To know what is now, to know what was yesterday, you cannot go by memory or by karma. You have to develop the discrimination of what is.

Pattabhi Jois: No, they have not changed. They have remained the same the whole time. Our method from the beginning has been that a posture needs to be perfected before you move on to more difficult ones. Each posture works progressively to increase the energy level and the opening of the body.

WHAT IS THE BEST REMEDY FOR HELPING PEOPLE? DO YOU TREAT EVERYBODY EQUALLY?

Desikachar: If somebody asks me, then I will help. But if they will not allow me to, how can I help? How can I fill a glass with water that is already full?

Pattabhi Jois: Taking practice! And to make people aware of *yama* [the first limb of Ashtanga yoga] and *niyama* [the second limb of Ashtanga yoga], and of how to control their bodies—these are the best remedies. When they are aware, controlling the senses becomes easier. But, primarily, *yama* and *niyama* are the best remedies for anybody with an interest in the practice.

WHAT IS THE MOST REWARDING ASPECT OF YOUR WORK?

Desikachar: I am an engineer by profession. When I used to work, I would meet people in a professional environment. But in my role as a yoga teacher, I meet people as a human being. I meet all kinds of people—poor people, important people, sick people—and I have developed intimate, friendly relationships with them. That is the most rewarding part of my work.

Pattabhi Jois: It is to see the growth and development of students, and to experience the love and gratitude they have when they come here to Mysore, year after year. We see so many students who come from all over the world to study with us. Some of them have full-time jobs and get only four weeks vacation per year, but they choose to devote that time to coming here to practice with us. To see this dedication and to see the happiness in people—that is what is truly rewarding.

WHAT IS YOUR PERSONAL YOGA PRACTICE LIKE THESE DAYS?

Desikachar: Next question, please.

Iyengar: I will not boast. Everybody will tell you that I am still practicing. I do my *sadhana* [meditational practice] and still do the postures. I do all the postures you see in *Light on Yoga* and do them every day.

Pattabhi Jois: I continue to practice *pranayama* and recite the Vedas for an hour and a half to two hours every day.

ON SPIRITUALITY

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF SPIRITUALITY TO YOU?

Desikachar: Spirituality is not religion. It is to care for one's family, for society—to heal and look after the interests and well-being of people. To give oneself to the service of humanity facilitates the greatest spirituality within man. All dogmas are transcended by following this principle—that is what I learned from my father. You see, at my age, my father was living in a small house, three meters by three meters square, which was divided by a curtain in the middle. He was teaching in the

front of the house and my mother was cooking in the back. You wouldn't believe the circumstances he lived in, but he loved it. And I always think of the generosity he showed. He was so poor and had five children and yet his teacher had told him to go and be a yoga teacher. He could have been a Sanskrit professor at any university in India, but because he respected his teacher, he dedicated himself to passing on the teachings of yoga, and to living simply and conveying the greatness of yoga through his humble manner. The king tried to give him rewards, but he would not accept them, because he knew that, as soon as he did, he would become a beggar. And the instant a teacher becomes a beggar to the king, he is no longer a teacher. This is what I remember of my father.

Iyengar: I have written about this in my books. You can refer to them.

Pattabhi Jois: Spirituality means energy and to meditate on that energy is spirituality. So, developing and having faith in this energy is spirituality. What the shastras tell me is what I believe, which is the Indian custom:

*Tasmat shastram pramanam te karya
akaryavyavasthitau
Jnatva shastravidhanoktam karma
kartum ibarhasi*

BG 16:24

[Therefore let the scriptures be your authority in ascertaining what ought to be done and what ought not to be done. Knowing what has been prescribed by the scriptures, you should act in this manner.]

So, the sacred scriptures are the whole foundation of our spiritual tradition. Without them, we are left to our own impressions. But with the scriptures, we are given a guide to follow. In the absence of belief, we can never really lift the veil of our own ignorance and discover what lies beyond it. Thus spirituality is believing.

WHAT IS SPIRITUAL ABOUT THE PHYSICAL PRACTICE?

Desikachar: If I go to a temple and there is a lot of mess in front of it, I don't feel like going inside. But if the temple

is clean, like a church, I will go in. It is the same with the body. A healthy body, a clean body, is more conducive to reflecting the mysteries of the soul. If you are suffering and sick and are approached by someone who is even more sick and stinking of death than you, you will naturally feel repulsed. If that person then asks for your mercy and help, you will feel no inclination to give it and will say instead, "Don't come near me! Get out!" So it is with sickness and old age. When they approach, it can already be too late, if one has never looked after one's body. So, to fulfill your *dharma*, you have to honor the body.

Iyengar: That is your question—your mind, not my mind. I do not demark differences between the body, the mind, and the self. To me, the body is the biggest self, the mind, a smaller self, and the self, the smallest self. So, they are all interconnected. In my practice, I seek to unite them and to experience how they are all interwoven. You see, the soul is the same for all individuals and nations, but our conditioning and culture determines our predisposition and outlook. The body is the receptacle for the soul and the mind—our operating tool for processing information and for being discriminative. The three work incessantly together, but a greater awareness of the physical body paves the way for a better receptivity to the dormant spirituality within. Yoga awakens the core of infinite possibility inside and confirms to the practitioner the extent of its applicability, rather than restricting it only to one area. The rays of the sun spread out everywhere. Equally, the rays of the soul pervade everywhere in our operational being. All our mental differences and predispositions are limited by time and space, but when we realize and rest in the core of our being, in our infinite potential, we awaken to a consciousness that is universal and no longer limited by our previous identification with it. This consciousness is direct, has no form or shape, and yet is reflected in our body and mind as an energy field, which we are free to interpret. We therefore engage in physical exercises designed to both present potent information to our

consciousness and to expand, at the same time, our level of consciousness within the body. If you don't know your body, don't know your hand, your backbone, or your knee, how can you develop this awareness? When performing *asanas*, the student's body assumes numerous life forms found in creation—from the lowliest insect to the most perfected sage—and learns that in all these, there breathes the same universal spirit, the spirit of God. He looks within himself while practicing and feels the presence of God.⁴ So, *asanas* act as a bridge to unite the body with the mind, and the mind with the soul.

Pattabhi Jois: Behind the strength of the body, there is an energy that is spirituality, and that is what keeps us alive. To gain access to the spiritual, you need to understand the physical. The body is our temple and inside that temple is *atman*, and that is God.

HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE PURUSA?

Desikachar: I am sleeping and get up in the morning and say, "Why did I sleep so well?" But how do I know this? Because of the *purusa*, which is something that is not sleeping, but is always present within us, all the time.

Pattabhi Jois: *Purusa* is light, the light that is *atman*, which is all and everything. *Purusa* is *jiva* [the individual soul], whereas *prakriti* [nature] is *maya*, or delusion. Due to the confusion that comes from living in the world of *samsara* [the cycle of rebirth], we fail to see the difference between *purusa* and *prakriti*, and treat them, instead, as one. But they are not one. *Purusa* is the pure, inner awareness of all that is, yet It is never subject to the fluctuations of the mind.

DOES YOGA CULTIVATE AN UNDERSTANDING OF PURUSA?

Desikachar: Yoga is like a cloud and the practice of yoga moves the cloud. There is disturbance, there is disruption, there are difficulties, but the practice of yoga centers the person in his own natural self. Naturally, when we sleep, something subsists beyond our dreams or beyond deep sleep. That is the *purusa*. Equally, when we think and experience,

⁴ *Light On Yoga*: 60

something is always there, facilitating our experience. To come to grips with this is the process of yoga. To facilitate an understanding of our mental modes of operation and to finally experience That which is the support of the whole process is also the process of yoga.

Pattabhi Jois: Only indirectly. Directly, it is the *vrittis* [thought patterns] which we come to control by the practice of yoga. It is not the *purusa*, which is constant and always there, though the practice does give one a clear mind, which may lead to an awareness of It. The actual understanding being facilitated, however, is of the thought patterns, or the *vrittis*. How they operate, how they bind you, and how you can gradually learn to experience what lies beyond them—that is what we come to understand by the practice of yoga.

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THE YOGA SUTRA YOGA CHITTA VRITTI NIRODHA?

Desikachar: The understanding mind plays a part in many activities. When all these are focused on one thing for a certain length of time, as I am listening to you now, then you are in a state of yoga. Being attentive is thus a form of yoga.

Pattabhi Jois: Patanjali's definition is simple: "Yoga is the process of ending the definitions of the field of consciousness." But to actually understand this in one's being is of a wholly different order. To understand words and concepts is easy, but to let the experience of yoga penetrate deep into one's heart, to realize fully what one is made of, and, finally, to establish the mind in the Self—these are very difficult.

*Manushyanam sahasreshu
kaschidyatati siddhaye*

*Yatatamapi siddhanaam kascinmam
vetti tattvatah*

BG 7:3

[Among thousands of men, one perhaps struggles for perfection. Among thousands of those that struggle, maybe one becomes perfect, but among thousands of men that are perfect, perhaps one knows Me in reality.]

HOW DOES YOUR SYSTEM FACILITATE THE EXPERIENCE OF YOGA?

Desikachar: That is up to the student, not to me.

Pattabhi Jois: To practice *asanas* and *pranayama* is to learn to control the body and the senses, so that the inner light can be experienced. That light is the same for the whole world. And it is possible for people to experience this light, their own Self, through correct yoga practice. It is something that happens through practice, though learning to control the mind is very difficult. Most important though is the practice. We must practice, practice, practice for any real understanding of yoga. Of course, philosophy is important, but if it is not connected and grounded in truth and practical knowledge, then what is it really for? Just endless talking, exhausting our minds! So, practice is the foundation of the actual understanding of philosophy.

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THE YOGA SUTRA TADA DRASTUH SVARUPE AVASTHANAM?

Desikachar: Read my book.

Iyengar: Haven't I told you this before? In *asana*, there is a centrifugal movement of consciousness towards the frontiers of the body, whether extended vertically, horizontally, or circumferentially, and a centripetal movement as well, as the whole body is brought to a single focus. If the attention is steadily maintained in this manner, meditation takes place.⁵ Thus, in the advanced practice of *asana*, the rhythmic flow of energy and awareness is experienced evenly and without interruption, both centripetally and centrifugally, throughout the channels of the body, and a pure state of joy will eventually be felt in the cells and the mind. The body, mind, and soul are then one. This is the manifestation of *dharana* and *dhyana* in the practice of *asana*.⁶ Awareness that constitutes the very resting place of the soul is sent everywhere throughout a posture. When all the muscles are properly maintained, the *atman* is reflected in its natural state, without pushing or frowning. So, you see, I just ride the tidal wave of awareness, scale away the layers of opposition, and rest in

the state of equilibrium inside. When something is contorted, awareness can become hard from too much effort, but until there is no distortion, everything will remain the same. Yoga therefore becomes the skill of resting with things in their equanimity and simply exploring what is presented beyond the pair of opposites. Energy then flows without interruption. Some people call it physical, others may call it spiritual. I would say it is a homecoming.

Pattabhi Jois: The *atman* [individual soul; inner Self] is the same in all people, but we give a name and form to It according to the nature of our mind and sense organs. Taking yoga practice helps control the mind and sense organs so that awareness eventually goes inside, toward this *atman*. There are two types of yoga, external and internal. *Yama*, *niyama*, *asana*, and *pranayama* are external. *Pratyahara*, *dharana*, *dhyana*, and *samadhi* are internal. As you take practice, you come to see God inside. The Katha Upanisad tells this:

*Paranci khani vyatratat svayambhub
Tasmat paran pasyati nantaratman
Kasciddhirah Pratyagatmanam aiksat
Avrtacaksur amrtatvam icchan
Kathopanisad 4.1*

[The self-existent Lord afflicted the senses so that they go outward. Therefore, one sees outer things and not the inner Self. A discriminating man, desiring immortality, turns his eyes away (from sense objects) and then sees the indwelling Self.]

So, when the sense organs are controlled, you will come to see your true Self, that is *atman*.

WHAT IS YOUR DEFINITION OF ABHYASA AND VAIRAGYA?

Desikachar: *Abhyasa* is the effort to persist with something over a long period of time, diligently and wholeheartedly. *Vairagya* is dispassion for the fruits of such effort. Both are equally important for a yoga practitioner.

Iyengar: They are two sides of the same coin. The head is *abhyasa*, the tail is *vairagya*. They are eternally connected for the practitioner. *Abhyasa*

⁵ Light On Yoga Sutras of Patanjali: 169 ⁶ Light On Yoga Sutras of Patanjali: 150

is a dedicated, unswerving, constant, and vigilant search of a given subject, pursued against all odds and in the face of repeated failures, for an indefinitely long period of time. *Vairagya* is the cultivation of freedom from passion, the abstention from worldly desires and appetites, and the discrimination between what is real and what is not real. It is the act of giving up all sensuous delights. *Abhyasa* builds confidence and refines the process of cultivating the consciousness, while *vairagya* eliminates the things that hinder progress and refinement. So, proficiency in *vairagya* develops the ability to free oneself from the fruits of action. But a bird cannot fly with one wing. So, we need the two wings of practice and dispassion-renunciation to be able to soar up to the zenith of Soul-realization.⁷

IS GOD IMPORTANT TO A PHYSICAL PRACTICE? WHAT IS YOUR DEFINITION OF THE YOGA SUTRA ISHVARA PRANIDHANAD VA?

Desikachar: A good teacher sees the commonality of all human beings and helps each individual find his uniqueness. Since this is a light present in all of us, we must honor humanity and let the love of human beings itself be what guides us in the process. So, God is not necessarily Brahma or Vishnu. He is a reference, like my father is my reference and Iyengar is a reference and Pattabhi Jois is a reference too. You don't know how much difficulty they went through when they were young, how many hardships they had to endure. They are thus models and references for me. I have many gods, but the most important is *Ishvara* [the In-dweller]. *Ishvara* is my model and, because It is, I have to exert more effort and go further and further to align myself with It. Whatever I need to do, I do. Whatever I cannot do, I avoid. That is the meaning of Patanjali's sutra.

Pattabhi Jois: The reason we do yoga is to become one with God and to realize Him in our hearts. You can lecture, you can talk about God, but when you practice correctly, you come to experience God inside. Some people start yoga and don't even know of Him,

don't even want to know of Him. But for anyone who practices yoga correctly, the love of God will develop. And, after some time, a greater love for God will be theirs, whether they want it or not. It is true and that is why yoga is real. It develops inside you and helps you to realize the inner light of the Self.

THE FUTURE OF YOGA

HOW DO YOU VIEW THE FUTURE OF YOGA?

Desikachar: I have total faith in the future of yoga.

Iyengar: My friend, why do you worry about the future? Leave it to God. He is eternal. If he wants it to survive, it will survive. Who am I to speak of the future? What have I done? I have cultivated, I have built up, I have presented and developed the subject of yoga. Now leave it to eternity.

WHAT IS THE GOAL OF YOGA ACCORDING TO YOU?

Desikachar: Peace, *shanti*: that is the goal of yoga.

Iyengar: It is to become free of the actions that afflict you. When you get rid of these and the body-mind-soul is cleansed, what is left? Yoga!

WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IN LIFE TO YOU?

Desikachar: *Shanti*.

Iyengar: Initially, the practice of yoga, but now, increasingly, it is to present the correct form of yoga to my students around the world. In the beginning, I primarily did yoga to develop my intelligence and evolutionary strength. Now that I have the knowledge of that, I'm using it in the best way I can. So, first, there was an involution, but now I'm trying to improve the evolution. But I don't teach for myself. I share things with people. I have a very big heart and what my heart says is, "Don't keep it to yourself. Don't let it die." So, whatever I have, I give to others. When I die, I will know that I didn't keep any secret in my heart, but let it out. And I am still practicing, so God will probably give me a better life in the next life and I will start from where I left off.

WHAT IS IT THAT HAS KEPT YOU DOING YOGA FOR ALL THESE YEARS?

Desikachar: When I'm travelling, I must confess, yoga has become an addiction to me—a good addiction. I feel sick if I don't do my practice or meditate. I think that what I am today is because of yoga. I see colleagues from my university and they look so sick, they are so bored, they have no life, no light. Here in India, when they retire, people get bored with life. They get sick. So, how do you generate health? I see my uncle—what an energy he has! And I see Pattabhi Jois—what an energy and strength he has! And I see other people and they can hardly walk. There is something about yoga. And it proves that it awakens an energy in people, that it awakens something beautiful which sustains and supports them from within, and which reveals itself to human nature.

Iyengar: The inner intelligence that is continually being revealed. ❧



⁷ *Light On Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*: 14