

Huge variety of Krishnamacharya`s teachings - Interview with Srivatsa Ramaswami

S. Ramaswami (born 1939 in Madras, Tamil Nadu, India) was a student of the father of modern yoga, Shri T. Krishnamacharya, and studied under him for 33 years, from 1955 until 1988 shortly before Krishnamacharya's passing. He is Krishnamacharya's longest-standing student outside of Krishnamacharya's immediate family. He currently lives and teaches in the U.S.

Yuri Sharonin

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Interview with **Srivatsa Ramaswami**

Questions: Yuri Sharonin, Ilya Zhuravlev



Yuri: Lets talk a about your Guru, Sri Krishnamacharya (1888-1989). You were studying with him until the end of his life, for 33 years. It seems that his teaching was represented by two major periods: teaching in Mysore (1926-1953), and teaching in Madras (Chennai) (1955-1989). Each period spans roughly 30 years. Nearly entire former period went under a patronage of the Mysore royal family, in his prime years. His Chennai years started in his mid-50s, and lead into the sunset of his life. How did you meet him?

Shrivatsa Ramaswami: Yes, in fact, I had described this in my book [Yoga for the Three Stages of Life, see also an extract published as "My studies with Sri Krishnamacharya" in Namarupa magazine]. What happened is that I have a brother, who is somewhat handicapped. My father was told by one of his friends that there were a yogi from Mysor that settled down in Madras, and he was coming and teaching at the college where my father's friend was the Principal. And he suggested - "Why don't you try him?" My father met him, and brought into my house. He started to teach my brother, and all the members of my family one by one joined him. In fact, Krishnamacharya was coming to my house about 4-5 years every morning - about 4-5 days a

week he would come and teach for an hour, hour and a half. After a long period of time my farther discontinued studying with him, but I continued. Later on I started going into his house, and this went on for a long, long time.

What was your first impression of him?

First impression was that he appeared to be a bit stern. But once he started to teach - the first thing he said was "Inhale, raise your arms. Breath with hissing sound, rubbing sensation in the throat." - I had never seen a yoga teacher doing it with breathing. I used to have a few teachers, seen a few books. I was young - just 15 at the time. Like all Indians, I had some exposure to yoga. First thing that struck me was the use of breath, the way he was teaching vinyasas. He was very clear with his instructions. And then also types and number of vinyasas he was able to teach - that was also very impressive. Even with the first few classes I can see that yoga was much different than how we were practicing in India at that time. I had started studying with him, this went on, he started to teach lots of other things. Soon he started teaching pranayama, then afterwards he started teaching Vedic chanting. I had some exposure to chanting when I was young; I liked the way he taught Vedic chanting. Then he started to teach various texts, like Yoga Sutras, Samkhya Karika... So this went on. I never knew he was a scholar, I thought he was just a yoga teacher. But later on I found he was an exceptional scholar.

Did you have any background in sports, any martial arts?

Me? No, not in martial arts. But I used to play cricket at school; I was playing tennis also. I had some exposure. In fact, I was in college tennis team, captain of the team. I used to play ping-pong. Once I started studying with him, I slowly cut down on these, and concentrated more and more on yoga.

Do you feel it helped you?

No, it feels so different, you know. Yoga was so different. But I used to be interested in yoga as a physical culture. Even in school we had a yoga teacher. I've learned many simple asanas. But the big difference was use of breath. I had never seen anyone to teach like this. And look at the vinyasas - the number of vinyasas he taught was quite enormous!

Was yoga in India then considered to be mostly physical, as it is now in the West?

Yes, in India yoga was considered mostly physical, but still, the way yoga was practiced is not the way yoga is practiced in the west. It was still a physical practice, but more - subtle. They would

practice some of the well-known asanas, like headstand, shoulderstand, and few forward bends. But not the kind of difficult postures you would find in the West. A few teachers used to do it, but by and large, general public had about half a dozen - ten different asanas that they would practice. Most of them would be able to sit in vajrasana, or padmasana; most of them would be able to do a shoulderstand, or headstand. That's about all the practice we used to do. And a few people will do Surya Namaskara. But of course there are other people who are yogis. Usually yogis are known for their extraordinary feats, like getting buried in the pit, or laying down on the bed of nails, or thorns. These are few exceptions here and there. General public were interested in yoga, but their interest were limited to a few asanas. You would practice for 15 minutes or half an hour every morning. Not the kind of intense practice you find in the West. That is my understanding.

When did you realize that he is your Guru?

I just started going to him - I thought everything he has to offer was very useful to me. I did not have any plan. I was very young then. I used to be interested in Indian philosophy at that time. When he started teaching I found that was another dimension to his teaching, which I thought was very good for me. I did not know he was able to do that. One day, I think it was his son, Desikachar - we started chanting together - came and asked "I am going to study Yoga Sutras with my father. Would you like to join? My father asked me to find out from you." I got interested, and started to study Yoga Sutras also. After we went through Yoga Sutras, we went through the commentary of Vyasa. By that time 4-5 years are gone by. Then he was started saying "why don't you study Samkhya Karika?" So we went on studying Sankya Karika. Like that, he would suggest which subject I should study, and I studied with him.



Young Ramaswami & Krishnamacharya

How did you came to know T.K.V. Desikachar?

I came to know him, because he is Krishnamacharya's son. He was studying somewhere else; after he completed his studies he came to Madras, and started to work with his father. He also started studying with his father. We came to know each other very well, because we are more or less the same age. I studied number of chants with Desikachar; we used to sit and chant along with Krishnamacharya. Yoga Sutras we studied together, Samkhya Karika we did once. A few Upanishads we did together. Then after some time, some common classes, Krishnamacharya stopped teaching, and asked his sons to teach. I was asked to study with Desikachar; I studied with Desikachar for a while. But then when Krishnamacharya started teaching texts, he said, he did not want me to have two teachers - he would take over and teach me.

How old were you at that time?

When I started studying I was 15, after he came to Madras and settled down. Then when Krishnamacharya stopped teaching for a year or so, at that time I was maybe 27-28, and after that I went back to study with him, until year before he passed away.

Did he ever talk about his Guru, memories of his studies, or his students?

No, no. In fact, he never spoke about his guru, at least to me. Maybe he told about it to his son. But basically our classes were confined purely to studies. I would go there, he would start with his prayer, go through the class, and then at the end another prayer, and then I used to come out. Very, very minimal communication on anything. Once in a while he would ask me, "How is your father?" Otherwise there were little or no talk. He never spoke of his guru. And I was not interested in that, I have never asked him. About his students, I don't think he spoke, except once or twice about Iyengar, I think. But about Pattabhi Jois I have never heard him saying anything. Or Indra Devi. Not for any reason, it just happened that way. There were no need for him to talk about it. Sometimes when you would ask questions which are not entirely connected with the subject, he would not encourage you to ask those questions.

I don't know his lineage as far as his teachers. I've never asked him, he never told me. There is a saying "don't investigate the Nadi Mula and a Rishi Mula. Mula means the origin, Rishi means the sage. Don't try to find out his antecedents. Likewise, don't try to find out the source of a river. What I wanted from him, is whatever he could give. And he was interested in giving that. I am still not interested in all the gossip that goes on, what his teacher was, how did he develop his asana practice. Sometimes people say he borrowed his techniques from gymnastics... Then I get upset a little bit. Otherwise, let people say what they want to say. I go with what I directly was able to see from him.

These days it is pretty common to indicate which lineage of yoga one follows, how did one come about it, and so on.

Yes, but you see, at that time I went to him, I liked what he taught. He knew he had a proper lineage. And moreover, the way he was talking about scriptures, vaishnavite philosophy, and all that - you could see he was a great scholar. Subsequently I came to know through Desikachar that he had different degrees, in Samkhya, in Vedanta, in Vedas, number of other degrees. I knew he was a great scholar by the way he was teaching. And it is very difficult to find in India a teacher with such a comprehensive background. Normally yoga teachers have a very limited understanding of the shastras - only physical aspect. But this was one man, who had tremendous control, tremendous knowledge about yoga - I am talking about physical aspect, and also knowledge of the shastras. You can't find a person like that. That made me go to him - I thought I can get anything I want from him.

Looking back, what do you think was most unique about him?

His scholarship, his understanding. And one more thing - in India, when you want to study some of these texts, want to study Vedanta, you won't find anybody who would be prepared to teach you at your level. I did not have a necessary background. But Krishnamacharya was able to come down to my level and teach. He was not just a scholar - he could explain it to you so you can understand. Initially it was a bit difficult for me - I had to raise my own level. But at the same time he would come down to your level; he would talk to you so you would see he wants you to understand the basic principles. Whereas if you would go to lectures of scholars, you would get just a scholarly presentation. And you don't really get the feeling that these are all Atma Vidyas, things that are meant for our own good. So when you study Yoga Sutras, Vedanta with him, you would get the feeling these are all meant for us.

How he selected his students? Was he teaching to anyone who is willing to listen?

I don't know. So far as I am concerned, he came to my house, I saw him, and I started to study with him. He did not reject me, nor I did went about searching for a guru. I don't think he was very choosy about anybody who wanted to study with him, but then unfortunately not many people at that time came and studied with him. Of all those people who came to him, 90% of them came for some ailment or other, so he came to be known better a person who used yoga therapy. They did not know what he can offer. Most people came for some ailment or the other, and after that they used to go - very few people stayed with him for a long time. There were one or two who studied with him for a long period of time, but they did not want to teach, they had other avocations. He

did not specifically ask me to teach, until twenty years or so. One day he asked me "would you like to teach?" Until that time, I did not think of teaching, because when you sit in front of him, and study with him, you get a feeling you do not know anything. When this started, I started to think about various things I don't know, rather than what I knew. As I was studying I was also teaching - it helped me to improve my teaching, I asked more questions. I was able to broaden my base much better once I started teaching. As you start teaching, you start developing. It is a parallel development: you go back, refer to whatever he had said. That was a very good experience: studying with him on one side, on the other side going and teaching.

Most of his teachings really are not well-known. If you say that most of his teachings limited to few of the sequences that you find in the modern Ashtanga Yoga, I think that's not fair to him.

Have you observed his practice?

No, no. Ekagrata. Everyone has his own practice. But occasionally - suppose I was five minutes early to his class, I could probably sometimes see him doing his headstand, or shoulderstand, or sitting in mahamudra, or some of those postures. But then, he would be completing his practice. So I would stand outside. Of course he did not object me observing his practice, but you don't really go sit down and look. Sometimes he used to show some pranayama, some postures. Beyond that I did not observe his practice. And he also had daily puja which he was performing, so I had a good idea how he spent his time.

India had changed tremendously during those years. How is his teaching had changed through the years you had studied with him?

I studied with him on one-to-one basis. I have no idea how he taught others, except when he asked me to come and observe if he wanted. For instance, when he was treating some people, occasionally he would ask me to come and observe. That was very rare, not frequent. I really have no idea how he taught others. But I can't believe that he taught anybody without breathing, synchronizing the breathing with the movement. Every time - it was thirty years - every class I go to, he would start with the breathing. Another thing - he gave a lot of importance to pranayama, he gave a lot of importance to chanting. That is why I try to combine all of them, whenever I try to present this program [LMU 200hr TT], because he taught all these subjects.



What was it like to study with him?

His main goal was to convey the subject to the student, that's all. He would be focused totally on that. His focus would be teaching, and you would be always thinking whether you are able to understand what he was talking about. Usually he would close his eyes and speak for 5-10 minutes, because most of the Sutras he knew by heart. And then suddenly he would open his eyes to see if you were sitting there, then close his eyes and continue. With him, there were nothing extraneous. From the moment you come to the class and start with the prayer, go through the class, and end with the prayer. After the prayer is over, I would just stand up, and go out of the room, and then come back next class. He was totally focused on whatever he wanted to teach. Not merely the subject, but how to convey it so you will be able to understand. That is the main thing. I think the impression you get from studying with him was this: these are the shastras, scriptures. His life goal was to understand it, bit by bit, so they will become part of his own psyche, his own way of thinking. And then convey it to the next generation. The rest of the things were secondary. I don't know how he was earlier. You can see a fierce intent in transmission of knowledge. Of course he used to charge fees. He needed money, everybody needs money. But that was not the main thing. If you can show that you are really interested, he came out of his way to help you by explaining, that's about all. And normally I never used to ask questions. If I had a doubt, I would keep it to myself. I tried to understand it myself by thinking about what he said, did I miss something. Sometimes I refer to other notes, other commentaries. But usually, if I had a doubt, in two-three days time, I don't know how he knew, but he would

explain it. That was something very good about him. You can see that he was really interested in you, in your development.

Was he willing to be patient with a student, explain things over again?

I had never asked him many questions. Very rarely asked him. I think one time I'd asked him a question, because I did not understand, he said, "What is wrong you? You are not being observant." You are not listening. I kept quiet. Then I realized, yes, he mentioned about it. Why didn't I notice? One day he said, "your absorption is not good". So I used to be very attentive. Not because of compulsion, but because the way he used to put it. But then again, I had studied with him for thirty years, and subjects came up again and again; I had plenty of opportunities to reflect... Sometimes when he was teaching a new subject, even then things were explained again in a different way. The time factor, the length of time I could spent with him – that played a very big role. So what you should do is try to develop your own studies.

Krishnamacharya's scholarly qualifications are so numerous and impressive, he could have easily been a stellar scholar. Why do you think he chose to be a Yogacharya?

I will put it this way: There are hundreds and hundreds of yoga teachers, who just teach asanas. There are hundreds and hundreds of scholars who just teach philosophy. Very rarely you can find a person, who combined yoga practice, and also philosophy. And his approach was this: that without yoga it is not possible to achieve all those things that were mentioned in the shastras. If you want to be a Bhakti yogi, or you want to be a jnana yogi - whatever spiritual height you want to achieve, you have to have a solid yoga base, at least a solid hatha yoga practice, consisting of different asanas and pranayama. It is quite obvious: asana and pranayama are necessary to control one's rajas and tamas; without controlling rajas and tamas, you cannot really go into many of the meditative procedures mentioned. It was very clear the way he was teaching.

Which part of Krishnamacharya's teachings is least explored?

I think therapeutic applications of his teachings. His Chikitsa Krama. But then, I think more than giving simple movements or exercises to people, I think his approach to the Six Koshas is very important. It is not therapeutic application, it is more fundamental. This is something you can find in Yoga Rahasya, he mentioned these things. In Yoga Makaranda, see the kind of importance given to Pranayama, and also Bandhas, the inversions – few things that are unique to Yoga. They have to be put in a way, so that ordinary people will be able to appreciate things that could happen – rather than talk about chakras, and some of those things which are very difficult to explain. But you have to quantify it. The only reason why it is not brought about, is that we have to

validate all those things. Once validated, it will become very popular, I am sure. It is quite logical. It will be quite useful. More people will do Pranayama, more people will do the Bandhas, headstand, shoulderstand, more people will meditate. My wife is a doctor – she says they appear medically sound. Only thing is – she says, it will be better if you can validate it. I tried to do that, but I was able to do some minimal work. In fact, two-three years back I was start thinking about coming up with a book called “Yoga for Internal Organs”. I can use my wife's help, so she can deal with professional terms used by modern medical practitioners, so they can appreciate what's been said. But the only thing is, I need some more studies to be done.

I tried for two years, and initially got something done. But then I started coming here. Here, in the USA I cannot do anything. In India I stayed for two-three months, I cannot organize anything in that time. But still, I got it clear in my mind; I know what I want to do. What I need is some good technical design some experimental studies, so whatever I want to do he will be able to implement. I don't know kinds of various equipment available now. I don't even need a doctor. See, these people are trying to say how it won't work. First thing they say, oh yes, this won't work. So I need a technician, I want this to be done, studied. I think this time when I will go I will be able to get something done.

This is one project I would like to do. If I can't do it, it is OK... Maybe this time I will do this... Otherwise his emphasis was on Yoga Sutras, Philosophy, Vedanta, Bhagavad Gita... There is a group of people which was interested in India, studying with him, they were not interested in asanas. In fact, I know a person who is two-three years older than me, about 75-76. He was a long time student of Krishnamacharya. He studied asanas, but not very much. But he studied a lot of philosophy, not even chanting. Very good in Yoga Sutras and all that. But he did not want to teach. He became a Public Prosecutor, he is a lawyer. He did not want to leave his profession. But because of his law background – very very sharp fellow. Likewise, there are few people who studied with him, but at the same time they were not prepared to teach.

In your time of studying with Krishnamacharya, were there any Indians who were seeking yoga as sadhana? Not for health reasons, or mental peace, or studying philosophy?

People who came during his Madras/ Chennai stay, many people came for some therapy. Some chronic back problem, or neck problem, or scoliosis... Or sometimes they came due to inability to sleep, physiological problems. Sometimes people came for treatment of bronchial asthma. That was one group. The other group was people who were interested in vaishnavite philosophy. They came to him because he had a lot of knowledge about Vaishnavism. In fact, once he was considered for a top post, to head Vaishnava Mutt - Matha is a particular vaishnavite denomination. He was a great vaishnavite scholar, and many people came to study with him. He

used to teach Bhagavad Gita, Ramanuja's works, Desikan's works. That was another group. The third group was coming and studying asana. People like us, to whom he also taught related subjects like Samkhya, Hatha Yoga Pradipika, Upanishads...

And were there other ones who seeking yoga as sadhana?

Many of the real yogis keeping it to themselves. At that time there were number of renown yoga teachers - Kuvalayananda in north India, there was a yoga teacher called Sundaram in Bangalore area, Krishnamacharya was in Mysore... His book was popular at that time, people would look at his pictures and practice. But again, as I told you, it is all confined to few asanas.

What was Brahmacharya for Krishnamacharya?

Brahmacharya, of course is a strict celibacy. Patanjali talks about two types of Brahmacharya. Brahmacharyas, they called Naishtika Brahmacharyas, people who maintained Brahmacharya throughout their life, and have no problems. They can live without sex all their life. There are very few people like that. On the other hand, if you don't have this capacity, don't have this mental control, you are not allowed to remain a Brahmacharya throughout your life. In Brahmacharya Ashrama [first stage (Ashrama) of life in Vedic Ashram System, student life] you are expected to maintain the celibacy. But then , after completing studies, you must get married [enter the next stage, Grihastha, or householder], so you are not a nuisance to society. But still, as a Grihastha you can practice Yoga, then become Vanaprastha [next stage, in which one partially giving up material desires], ultimately, once all your duties are done, you can become a Sannyasi [the final life stage of the renouncer] and proceed. So Krishnamacharya used to say, that during Kali Yuga [current epoch, or Yuga, in the cycle of four yugas described in the scriptures], this particular period of time, Brahmacharya is not possible. There are more distractions, they are not as disciplined as during previous Yugas. Brahmacharya is not a choice. You can't just decide "I want to become a yogi. I want to become a Brahmachari." They won't allow that. If you even have thoughts about sex, you are not a Brahmachari, you must get married. This is a simple test. Unless you can maintain real Brahmacharya, you don't fool around, trying to say you are a Brahmachari. Because later on, all these people create problems.

That is why in Vaishnava philosophy, they don't allow to remain Brahmachari – even the heads of the Mutt. Whereas in the Advaita Shankaracharya tradition, boys are taken and then made into Shankaracharyas. This system of maintaining celibacy all life in several religions have been less than 100% successful. Unfortunately sometimes they make mistakes. When they make mistakes, they create lots of problems.

So basically, for him it was faithfulness to the marital vows.

Yes.

It is said that in his late years he practiced only Bhakti Yoga, as he was a great devotee of Lord Vishnu all his life. Does this mean that he came to conclusion that Patanjala ashtanga yoga, and samadhi is not a practical way to achieve Kaivalya?

No, that is not so.. He did not become a Bhakti yogi in his late years. He was a Bhakti yogi from the very beginning, it was his family tradition. If you want to categorize Krishnamacharya whether he was a Bhakti yogi, or a jnana yogi, or a hatha yogi, I would say he was a Bhakti yogi. That was a main thing. Everything else he did would have to lead to Bhakti yoga. But then he also used to tell, that various procedures and practices mentioned in Yoga Sutras are very important, because Bhakti Yoga does not deal with that. That is why he started teaching. He used all angas of ashtanga yoga, or Patanjala yoga darshana, and simultaneously developed a Bhakti yoga practice. He used to say there is only one dhyana - that is Bhagavat dhyana - meditation on the Lord. Once you practice your pratyahara, next thing for you would be meditating on the Lord. So all those things mentioned in Yoga Sutras become very academic, because that's not what you want. His purpose was to have a vision of the Lord, everything would be directed towards that.

And what is the predicament of non-believer?

If you have no faith in God, then you can go through the procedures mentioned there. Yoga Sutra provides provisions for that: do your pranayama, your meditation, try to develop one-pointedness, and then try to understand True Self. None of them requires belief in God. There is a royal path available. But if you believe in God, you got additional support, additional help. You can use that.

Have you seen him practicing asana in his late years?

Yes, that is what I told you before. But not the same kind of asana you see him doing in 1938 film, not that kind of yoga. He himself used to say that you have to change your approach to yoga as you get older. Clearly, more emphasis on pranayama. And then, I've seen his pranayama - something extraordinary was in a way he was able to expand his chest, and then do the bandhas afterwards. He insisted that everybody should practice pranayama. Unfortunately, nowadays pranayama is neither taught, nor encouraged.

It is said that Krishnamacharya was continued to call himself a student because he felt that he was always "studying, exploring and experimenting" with the practice. It seems like his practice

changed through the years. His yoga as presented in Yoga Makaranda seems quite different from yoga he taught you.

I would not say Yoga Makaranda and Yoga Rahasya are complete representation of the way he taught. Sometimes when you write a book, you are writing about some asanas, how particular asana should be done.

Watching snippets of his 1938 movie, one get impression of very active, fast practice.

Right, right. I will tell you that all those things were done with a purpose of demonstration. For the purpose of people knowing it. See, when he was teaching in Mysore, he was teaching youngsters. He was also teaching the royal family. I don't think he was teaching those things to the royal family. They were not jumping through, or doing those difficult things. He would adopt to individual requirements. People like to see those things, so he presented things that people like to see. And that does not mean that this was what was he teaching. Even at that time he was teaching differently to different people.

It is clear that he was leaning towards individual, one-on-one approach in his later years.

No, even in earlier years. Whatever you see in the movies, in those photographs, or whatever is mentioned in Yoga Makaranda - he wanted to present a particular view of the whole thing. Whereas in Yoga Rahasya he says that the whole thing have to change, depending upon your age, view not found in Yoga Makaranda. So books are not a complete picture of how he was teaching. That is what I feel reading Yoga Makaranda, Yoga Rahasya, those movies. And I think he himself would say it sometimes that those were made to attract people towards yoga. Because people like to see those things, and shown them. He was capable of that. I would not say that his teachings were confined to what you see in 1938 movie, or what was mentioned in some of the earlier books. That is my view.

There is a saying "Success is 99% practice." Pattabhi Jois used to say: "Practice and all will come." Is the secret is just practice, or studying shastras is essential? What place study of scriptures should take in one's progress?

Again, it all depends on individual interests. If you are happy with asana practice, and maintain that, that is good. But the way Krishnamacharya used to teach, it may not be sufficient. Practice changes as we get older. That is why he had three different kramas: srishti krama when you are young and growing, with emphasis on asanas and vinyasa; in midlife chikitsa, or sthiti krama to maintain a good health, and then as you get older, anta, or samhara krama. Philosophy helps to

guide you in the old age. Many times in India, after they get to 60 years, they retire, and start studying Vedanta philosophy - it is difficult to understand it then. You have to have a good grounding even when you are young. I think people who practice only asana, and try to be satisfied with that - after some time... It is not a complete picture.

So much written about Yoga Sutras, it is so commented, that frequently comments obscure the original meaning rather than clarify it. What was Krishnamacharya's method of studying scriptures, Yoga Sutras in particular?

He considered Yoga Sutras as the most important text if you want to study yoga. It is the most important text, because it contains yoga philosophy. And yoga philosophy considered to be one of the fundamental philosophies belonging to the Vedic period. If you want to study yoga philosophy, you want to study Yoga Sutras. And then he said, once you have understanding of Yoga Sutras, you can compare it with other texts. If other yoga text is consistent with Yoga Sutras, then it is acceptable. Because Yoga Sutras by itself cannot explain everything in great detail. It can only explain basic parameters, because it was meant to be brief. It gives overview of the whole thing, and at the same time gives all the necessary details about the important things. If you want to know more about asanas, yes, Yoga Sutras gives only two sutras to explain parameters of asanas. It does not tell you about various asanas. There is a general rule "anuktam anyato grahyam" if the main text does not explain certain things, you have to go to other texts, which will help you to understand. That's a common approach.

When I studied Hatha Yoga Pradipika with him, he said that most of it is quite acceptable, but there are certain areas that are not acceptable, you do not have to read them. Especially some portions of the Third Chapter. How do you tell they are not acceptable? They are not consistent with Patanjali Yoga Sutras, go against principles of Raja Yoga. HYP is a very good text, but don't take it as a Gospel Truth. But otherwise, it is an excellent book – especially for Pranayama, the varieties of Pranayama discussed, you get idea about that. But in the olden days there were number of yoga systems which seem to violate some of the Yamas Niyamas mentioned in the Yoga Sutras. So he would say, be careful about that. People who study the Yoga Sutras will know - this is not according to main teachings of the Yoga Sutras.

Can you give any example of that?

There are many practices that are not helpful to maintain brahmacharya. They are considered to be OK in some traditions, if they encourage that, or experimenting along those lines. He would say, don't go near those practices. This kind of information is available when you go to traditional yoga teacher, like Krishnamacharya. But if you go to a teacher who does not belong to this

tradition, you do not know. There was a lot of mixing up in yoga practices in the olden days. and more so nowadays.



Ramaswami teaches.

How did he study actual source? There is actual text, which is very terse, and there are a lots of translations and commentaries. How did he approached it?

Let us take Yoga Sutras. The first time around, he would just take the sutra, word by word meaning. Give a brief understanding of the sutra. Give a derivation of each and every word. The first reading itself, you are very close to the text. Then whenever you read the commentary it goes much easier. But nowadays what happen is that people do not read the sutras, because some understanding of Sanskrit is necessary. Krishnamacharya would break down every word, every word in the source, and then explain etymology. That way you get very close to the Sutras. That is the first reading. Second reading you go to the commentary. Then it becomes that much easier. If you read only the commentary, and don't have understanding of sutra, what it means - I read a commentary, write a book, then somebody reads my book, he writes another book... Over the period of time meaning becomes completely different, watered down - this is not acceptable.

When I was young, there were not many people who were teaching Yoga Sutras at that time, because Yoga Sutras was considered to be a very difficult text to deal with. Whereas people would teach Vedanta very easily. Brahma Sutras were taught. At that time, I remember Yoga

Sutras were taught more in Western universities than in Indian universities. You apply to the shastri position in Sanskrit college (teacher learned in the texts and commentaries) - people would prefer to study Nyaya Shastra, or Nyaya, Vyakarana (grammar), or Mimamsa, or Vedanta. Very few people were studying Yoga Sutras, because many people did not have necessary background to teach yoga. Yoga studies were very limited at that time, and only Krishnamacharya and few people like that could teach. Now, of course, almost everybody teaches Yoga Sutras. I remember we were very, very reluctant to explain Yoga Sutras at that time, because we were afraid we were not explaining it properly. Now because yoga is popular, people started to teach Yoga Sutras.

He taught only Vyasa's commentaries. And then there were another comments by Shree Shankaracharya. But more than anything else, I would say that Krishnamacharya interpretation of Yoga Sutras was the most important thing. Again, the way he was approaching it was - go to the Sutras. Try to understand the Sutras without any of these frills. Then when you want a little more about it, and these commentaries will be helpful. But you can't understand Yoga Sutras by reading commentaries alone. You must have a basic understanding of the whole thing by reading the Sutras.

When you start to explain Yoga Sutras through commentaries - "this commentator says this", "this commentator says this", - this way you are not really explaining the Sutras. There is little point in saying "X says this", "Y says this", etc. What is it you want me to understand? This is exactly what you would get from Krishnamacharya: he would explain what it means. You would study it, and then think about it. Because there should be cogency. Some of the things he would say - Yoga Sutras are divided into three parts and addressing meant for three different groups: the born yogi, an entry-level yogi, and a life-long yogi. This kind of representation you cannot find in modern commentaries. Then what happens, you try to take one sutra from here, one sutra from there, and then try to paste some meaning out of it. There is a structure to it, you know. That he was able to present properly. Again, you don't find that even in traditional commentaries. This makes you understand Sutras structure, whom Patanjali is addressing, all these things. It becomes easier when you study with a guru like him.

What other works he considered to be essential?

After the Yoga Sutras, he asked us to study Samkhya Karika, because a lot of things that are taken for granted in Yoga Sutras you find in Samkhya Karika, that is a theoretical basis for Yoga. [Yoga philosophy piggybacks on Samkhya philosophy.] He taught Samkhya Karika shloka by shloka, and then he also used Gaudapada's brief commentary on that. First you go through the Samkhya Karika text, and then - the commentary. There is also equally good commentary by

Vachaspati Mishra; both are available in English translation. Traditional translations are available.

That was the second most important text.

Then he went on to teach several of Upanishads. Not the complete Upanishads - he would take one section, they called Vidyas, Upanishadic Vidyas. Like the Panchakosha-Vidya, or Panchagni-Vidya, or Sad-Vidya, Bhuma-Vidya... That went on for a number of years. And of course, in addition to that - chanting, a lot of chanting. I have learned a lot of chanting.

Was it part of part of Bhakti Yoga?

No, the interpretation of Svadhyaya in Yoga Sutras is study of the Vedas. Chanting of the Vedas. [Traditions of Vedic chant are considered oldest unbroken oral tradition in existence, dating back to early Iron Age.] He would teach chanting of mere Yoga Sutras, some portions of Upanishads. Upanishads portions of Jnana - the knowledge portion. And some Bhakti - like Purusha Sutra, Rudram Chamakam. They are Bhakti portions. And some of them are rituals. You take Surya Namaskara mantra, the chanting is done every Sunday. Those supposed to have a very laudable benefits - if you chant Surya Namaskar, you are supposed to have a very good health. He used to say, even if you only hear those mantras, you are bound to feel healthier. That kind of belief is there. We used to study and chant Surya Namaskar every Sunday along with him for a number of years. There were number of other sections he taught. Mere chanting itself has an effect. Chants are supposed to vibrate in different chakras in the body, they are very auspicious sounds. If you believe in that and chant, it has a very salutary effect on your system.

Vedic chanting must be done in a very particular way, and it is not singing, is it? [The oral tradition of the Vedas consists of several pathas, recitations, or ways of chanting the Vedic mantras.]

Yes, you cannot change that. He himself studied the Vedic chanting when he was young, and he was able to teach us.

Krishnamacharya wrote several books throughout his life. He wrote in his mother tongue, Kannada. What was his target audience - who was he writing for? E. g. Yoga Makaranda has a very different form than Yoga Rahasya.

I think Yoga Makaranda was written for Indians in general. It was not addressed for Western audience per se. He wanted many Indians who were not practicing yoga to start practicing. He was probably directed by Maharajah of Mysore to write a book, and I understand he wrote it in two-three days time; pictures were taken, and he wrote the whole thing. It was two things - one is the instructions for Maharajah, and two - he wanted more Indians to practice yoga.

Whereas Yoga Rahasya is a text which was lost, remember, I told the story of Natamuni wanting to transmit a knowledge to his grandson. He wanted to represent the Vaishnava Yoga, yoga based on vaishnavite philosophy, and also number of other things that he wanted to say: the therapeutic benefits of some of the procedures, like pranayama, etc. So he wrote that book. I don't know when he wrote that, because during the class he used to quote from Yoga Rahasya, he would say "this is what Yoga Rahasya says." I used to note down many of those things. But later on Desikachar was able to collect all of them and publish it as a book, I found that some of the shlokas he taught in the class are not there, and some of the shlokas the he did not teach were actually there. Let us assume that he wrote everything himself, with the inspiration from Natamuni, if you take it that way. It was addressed partly the vaishnavite philosophy, partly the therapeutic applications. And also I could see he was talking about three stages of practice. There were few other ideas you do not find in Yoga Makaranda.

I think later on, towards the end of his life, he wrote a commentary for first chapter of Yoga Sutras. He wrote it in Kannada, translated to Tamil, and then published. Unfortunately, I don't know why it was not translated in English. I don't know if he wrote the commentaries on the other three chapters.

In his writings he sometimes comes across as severe, categorical, and sometimes angry. Is it sign of times, or his character?

A bit of disciplinarian he was. And all of that was directed by his firm belief in the shastras. It is not only him - most of the elders at that time were very forthright. They won't mince words, they tell you right in your face. Maybe is is the case in every civilization. He was one of those. Yes, he was very stern, but at the same time there was a very beautiful element in him, very nice things about him. He was interested in Yoga, how many teaches are there like that?

He was also a patriot. India was not independent at that time.

Yes, he believed that by following yoga, by maintaining good health Indians should be more disciplined and not be so easily swayed by Western influence at that time.

Krishnamacharya was speaking only in Kannada?

No, that's very interesting about him. He knew Kannada, his mother tongue virtually. He lived in Mysore. Then when he came to Madras, he learned Tamil, and started to teach in Tamil. He learned Tamil. He was in Madras for about two years before my father met him, and by then he

learned it. The only thing, he had a very strong accent. He would use many Sanskrit terms, that was very helpful. Initially, for first few days it used to be funny, like the way we speak English sometimes. Like that, he had an accent, he had an odd choice of words... But then, over the period of time you get used to it, and it was very good. No problem at all.

Did he understand or speak English?

He spoke English, but it was worse than his Tamil. English was very difficult. But at the same time he had Western students, and they were able to understand him.

Did he have Western students?

Yes, at that time there was an American Consul General in Madras. He learned Tamil, and then he would study with him.

What was his name? I wonder what become of him?

His name was Dr Albert Franklin. He is no more. But he was a very, very good friend of his. He was my father's age. He was a good friend of his, and he and his wife used to come there. I don't know if he wrote anything about Krishnamacharya, but I think he studied with him for a number of years, because he was living in Madras, and he was US Consul General. He was one of those people who did not merely studied asanas. He also studied number of other things. I think he studied Bhagavad Gita, Yoga Sutras, and all that. He was a Harvard Ph. D in Political Science, great scholar. A very nice man.

Were there any other western students?

This one I remember. May be there were a few others. Because sometimes after his class was over, I used to go for my class. I used to meet him just outside the class and speak for couple of minutes. He knew Yoga very well. I wish people like him teach Yoga. Unfortunately... This man would have been a very good teacher. I don't know why he chose not to teach. Indra Devi was there.

Indra Devi was born and brought up in Russia, actually. She emigrated after the revolution, but visited USSR a couple of times after she settled in Argentina.

I've met her just once, for a few minutes. She came to see him on his 99th birthday or something. I did not speak to her; somebody introduced me, she said "Hello."

Did he ever share his thoughts about Tantra?

You see, Tantra itself is a huge subject. There are some practices that were considered to be not acceptable from the Vedic approach. They called it Sadachara and Vamachara. He was pretty severe about Vamachara practices, objectionable practices. If it is an idol-worship, some people say it is Tantra. He himself used to practice that. He had an icon, and worshiped it on a regular basis, but that is acceptable. And then some other practices, like I told you, in Hatha Yoga Pradipika, that are not acceptable. He would say "Be careful about those practices."

Are you familiar with tradition of Tamil siddhis (sittars), and Tirumantiram scripture? Do you think this tradition is still alive?

In fact, I wrote an article about Tirumantiram in Namarupa magazine (there was also an article about Tirumular and Tirumantiram in Vinyasakrama Oct 2009 newsletter).

Tirumular was a great yogi, supposedly a contemporary of Patanjali. He was more known as siddha. The entire Tirumantiram consists of 3000 verses or so. There is one section, one eighth of it, is on ashtanga yoga. The others is about Tapa Siddhi. If you want to understand those, it is a very good text. Some shlokas hit you as very very meaningful.

In your opinion, why in lineages originated from Krishnamacharya (B.K.S. Iyengar, Pattabhi Jois, T.K.V. Desikachar, you, A.G. Mohan) Shatkarmas (cleaning procedures) are not taught? In his early work, e. g. Yoga Makaranda, he gave plenty of attention and importance to these practices. In traditions of Sivananda, Bihar school of yoga, Vivekananda, and followers of Dharendra Brahmachari place great emphasis on teaching these procedures.

In fact, Krishnamacharya, when he started teaching us, never gave much importance to them. Only the kriya that he said was important was Kapalabhati kriya, because you are not putting anything external into the system. See, Kapalabhati takes the air to cleanse the whole system, whereas other kriyas introduce a lot of foreign material. And they are not very pleasant. He said, in fact I do remember him indicating it, he mentioned them because they are all in the texts. It does not mean you should practice them. He himself would say, I think it is mentioned somewhere, that these are not necessary for everyone, only people who got a lot of toxins that should be removed. They should practice this. So when we were practicing, he said, "it is not necessary for you, your breathing is normal, you do not have to do all those kriyas." When you talk about the system, you must know that these are various things available, use it if it is necessary, not on the regular basis. You don't need to use Neti Pot daily, just because it is mentioned there.

To be able to use it, one needs to know how.

Yes, you have to learn how to use it.

Did he teach it?

No, at the time he said, "It is not necessary for you." At that time I was not thinking of teaching, so he was teaching only for my own requirements. I did not ask him how to do this, and he did not teach me. I do not teach it to anybody, because I don't know how to use this. And then Hatha Yoga Pradipika clearly says this is not for everybody, but only when absolutely necessary. Shat-kriyas need not be practiced by everyone. They are there if needed, it is an option we have.

Did he give any recommendations on massage, oil bath, other cleaning procedures?

Yes, oil bath is something that people in India, especially in South India, do it regularly. He did not give any particular recommendations, but he would say don't let anybody do an oil bath or a massage to you, as a yogi, a practitioner of yoga. You have to massage your own body, allow 20 minutes to half an hour for oil to soak, and then have a bath. And then there are some materials that are available to remove excess oil from the body. Usually this was done twice a week. He would also recommend taking castor oil twice a year for cleaning digestive tract. These were accepted practices. Normally in Madras we take a warm water bath in the morning. Many times we take a cold water bath, it is more refreshing. But Krishnamacharya insisted you take warm water bath. Of course yogis take cold water bath, we know that. But he said, at your age, this is what you should do. Naturally the condition of yogi who lives in Himalaya will be different. But from that day on, I take a warm water bath before my yoga practice.

Did he give any other recommendations on diet, sleep, or monitoring one's health?

As far as sleep is concerned, he would say, go to bed early, and get up early in the morning. Because morning is the best time for you to practice your yoga, or chanting, or meditation, or whatever. He himself used to wake up at 3 o'clock in the morning. But he used to go to bed around 8:30 at night. Of course, this would be difficult in the Western countries. In India sunset is always around 6pm, whether it is winter or summer. So he used to go to bed around 8-8:30, be up by 3 in the morning. By 6 or 7 would have completed all his morning ritual, and be ready to receive anybody for a class, about 7 o'clock in the morning. He would say, "go to bed early, get up early in the morning, try to get at least 6 hours of sleep."

"Don't put on weight, be careful about your diet." I think I mentioned to you, that he would say "don't allow your thighs and waist to spread."

Did he recommend measuring thighs, waist, and heart rate on a regular basis?

Yes. Another thing he would say, "don't allow a heart rate to go up, don't allow a breath rate to go up." Even though you are practicing asanas, you have to take a rest frequently. Whenever you find a student struggling for breath, don't ask him to go on. If the breath rate is above the normal, allow them to settle down. The whole purpose was to slow down the breath rate. The metabolic breath rate should come down.

He was also an Ayurvedic practitioner. It seems that in old days, yogic approach, including shatkriyas, was prevention of diseases, and was independent from Ayurveda.

Yes. Yoga texts in general don't talk about Ayurveda practices. Whereas Ayurveda, I understand, mentions that if diseases cannot be cured by Ayurveda, it should be tackled by Pranayama. That is what I hear. I did not study Ayurveda practices. But then you must also understand that yogi was usually a recluse. He did not have facility of Ayurvedic doctor/ vaidya. They would have to manage the everything by themselves. So yoga, over period of time, develop its own techniques of maintaining the good health. The first thing they would have to do is to have a good health, so they could sit down, meditate, be alone. From that point of view, yoga got enough material to maintain a good health.

How did he come up with Ayurveda? Did he use it in his own practice? Did he use it for healing?

For his own sake, I don't know if he used Ayurvedic preparations, I don't know. But whenever students came to him, he would teach them asanas. But asanas were not sufficient, because they did not have same discipline that he had. So he would supplement them with Ayurvedic preparations. I don't think Krishnamacharya himself was an Ayurvedic expert, Ayurvedic Vaidya. He had a good working knowledge of Ayurveda. That is my understanding. He would use them as a supplementary method. When students come to him, he used to prescribe medicated oils, for joint pain, or things like this. He also gave certain lehyam [Ayurvedic jam], powder. And he had a good understanding of human anatomy, physiology. He used pulse. He had his own methods of diagnostics. He would check your pulse, check your marmasthanas [vital body regions]. Few things he developed and used. I don't think he taught this to anybody. Maybe his son learned about it. He had a good working knowledge how to treat patients - with asana, with pranayama, with few Ayurvedic preparations. And sometimes he would teach some mantras to chant. Like that, he would draw from different sources, and then make a recommendations to his students.

Let's talk about Pranayama. In his writings he says numerous times, that Pranayama is the key

to the whole practice; it is the most important anga. Vinyasa Krama you teach is centered around the breathing.

Right.

And yet, Pranayama, by and large, taught on the fringes, and sometimes has an air of being remote like samadhi. Often presented as dangerous. How Krishnamacharya taught it, and how soon?

I don't remember when he started to teach me Pranayama. I know it was very early, because he had started to use breathing on day one. That itself is half Pranayama: long inhalation, long exhalation. You start from day one. And then Pranayama practice is regular. I think I mentioned, Pranayama practice is an integral part of daily routine in olden days. You are required to do ten times Pranayama with Gayatri Mantra, and all that. Pranayama is considered essential part of your daily life. You are required to do, say, ten in the morning, ten in the afternoon, ten in the evening, and there two or three in addition in every sitting. Virtually you do forty pranayamas every day. Everybody - you don't have to be a yogi to practice Pranayama. Everybody is required to practice Pranayama forty times every day. So, what's the big deal?

Samantraka Pranayama (pranayama with Mantra)?

Samantraka Pranayama. But still a pranayama. In fact it's a more difficult pranayama. If everybody, even non-yogi do forty times pranayama, why yogi should shy away from that? And I don't think Krishnamacharya told anybody not to teach Pranayama. He might have not told somebody to teach specifically pranayama, I don't know what happened. But he didn't prevent anybody... He taught Pranayama from very beginning. In fact, almost anybody who has studied with him learned Pranayama from him. He would himself teach Pranayama. Normally your asana practice ends with pranayama session. I have never come out from his class without practicing Pranayama. I think I've mentioned it several times. You see, Pranayama is the one that makes Yoga unique. In all other systems there is no control over the breathing. In all physical exercises, there is no control over the breathing. Here you try bring your breathing under voluntary control. If there is something very big, very unique about Yoga - it is the breathing. Any people who want to meditate, to achieve samadhi, achieve kaivalya, some of those things that are mentioned - if you shy away from Pranayama, how can you progress? You have to use this vehicle, you got to use Pranayama. Krishnamacharya was insistent that without Pranayama, there is no Yoga.

In fact, word Hatha, as in Hatha Yoga, means Pranayama. You look in the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, the commentator says Ha is Prana, Tha is Apana, Yoga is a Union, Hatha Yoga is a union of Prana

and Apana, which is Pranayama. So Hatha Yoga is Pranayama. How can you say, "I practice Hatha Yoga without Pranayama?"

I don't know why people are unnecessarily discouraged from Pranayama. Everything is dangerous. If you do Pranayama in very unorganized way, then perhaps... But then enough instructions are given in the books. And they say you have to be careful, you have to learn from a teacher. Yes, you have to learn from a teacher. See that it is within your limits. In fact in Hatha Yoga Pradipika, the first instruction is "Inhale as much as you can." Yetashakti "Exhale as much as you can." Slowly build your capacity. You have to work along these lines. People who discourage Pranayama are doing a disservice to Yoga. That may not be their intent, but they are creating unnecessary fear in people, and they are doing a disservice to Yoga.

One reason why people are reluctant to teach Pranayama because they are afraid of teaching it. They don't teach Pranayama because they don't want to get into any problem. They don't want to teach Sirsasana, or Sarvangasana because they don't want to get any problem. These postures, these procedures are a bit tricky. If you understand, if you are able to practice them – well and good; but sometimes you make a mistake, you feel very uncomfortable...

If Hatha Yoga is Pranayama, then Pranayama is Kumbhaka?

Kumbhaka is holding one's breath. It has to be preceded by inhale, or exhale. Pranayama is control of the breathing. Kumbhaka is the most essential aspect of that. You have to use your inhalation or exhalation before you are able to hold your breath.

How would Krishnamacharya teach it?

After you practiced your asana, he would ask you to sit in padmasana, vajrasana, etc. do your Kapalabhati, 108 times, or whatever. And then he would ask you to do - one day Ujjai, another day Sitali, another day Nadi Shoddana, like that he would slowly build up the practice, and then later on you have to practice Pranayama on your own. You don't have to teach forever. Once he knew that you practice your Pranayama properly, he would say at the end of the class, "practice Pranayama for 15 minutes."

Which Pranayamas were taught, and which ones were mostly frequently used?

Mostly, in Vinyasa Krama practice, he would use Ujjai breathing, because we use Ujjai in our practice, so it becomes easier. Ujjai and Nadi Shoddana are the two most important pranayamas. And then if you combine those two, you get Anuloma Ujjai, Viloma Ujjai, Pratiloma Ujjai. Occasionally he would ask me to do Sitaly pranayama. When weather is very hot, he would say

"you look tired, why don't you do a Sitali pranayama." The main emphasis was on Ujjai and Nadi Shoddana. Normally for Mantra Pranayama, they use Nadi Shoddana pranayama. Inhale through one nostril, chant the Pranayama Mantra, exhale through the other nostril. Nadi Shoddana pranayama is mentioned in the texts also.

What about Bhastrika, Brahmari?

Brhastrika, Brahmari are special pranayamas. They are not as common as Nadi Shoddana and Ujjai pranayamas. Because most of benefits expected from Pranayama you can get from these two procedures. Next question is how long you can inhale, what ratios you can maintain [puraka - antar kumbhaka - rechaka - bahya kumbhaka]; there are different parameters that come into play.

He did not use much of Bhastrika?

No. He would ask you to do Kapalabhati. Because Kapalabhati is a cleansing kriya. Bhastrika is a specific pranayama, for certain conditions.

What scriptures did he use as authority on Pranayama?

Hatha Yoga Pradipika talks about it. And then there are number of Smritis (texts) which refer to Pranayama, how to use the Mantras. Pranayama has two things: one is technique of doing pranayama; the other is how to use the mantra in this pranayama. There are several Upanishads, several Smritis which talk about Pranayama. So, lot of material available on Pranayama.

Pranayama, according to Krishnamacharya, not effective without Bandhas. Just as Bandhas not viable without Kumbhakas.

Yes, without Bahya Kumbhaka, especially.

How did he teach the Bandhas? And how soon?

Once your breathing is comfortable, you have long inhalation and exhalation, and you can hold the breath for a short period of time, Bandhas can be done. I think he taught Trataka Mudra as the best procedure positioned to teach Mula Bandha, and Uddiyana Bandha. Once you are able to do Bandhas in that position, then the next thing for you would be to try it in Adho Mukha Svanasana, then some of the seated postures, especially Padmasana and Vajrasana. These are the postures he would ask you to practice the Bandhas.

I think considerable confusion exists about Bandhas, and perhaps it may be useful for many people if we will discuss it. Let's go through three major bandhas. In case of Mula Bandha, queues can be very simple - yet books written about it.

He gave simple instructions, he did not elaborate on this. He would say draw your rectum and tighten lower abdomen. That is all instructions he would give. He would observe how your Bandha is, and say, it is fine. That's about all.

Uddiyana Bandha, anatomically, is a passive stretch of a diaphragm, done by exhaling, closing one's voice box and lifting the chest. But that description does not make it possible to do Uddiyana Bandha on inhale. Yet Hatha Yoga Pradipika talks about it. How is it done? Some lineages talk about Uddiyana Bandha vs. Uddiyana Kriya.

I don't know about Uddiyana Kriya, so I can't talk about it. Hatha Yoga Pradipika talks about Uddiyana Bandha, I think, even at the end of your inhalation, Antar Kumbhaka. I asked my teacher, he said, "this is not for Grihasthyas" [non-Brahmachari]. The idea appears to be getting the union of Prana and Apana, by pushing the Prana in the Antar Kumbhaka, pushing up Apana. It is a difficult procedure. Probably you can learn from a teacher. He himself practiced this, it is not impossible. But, the most benefit you get from certain things - for instance if you want to work with your heart, it is better to do it on exhalation. Depending upon the requirements, your condition. If you want Prana Apana Vayu to enter Sushumna and all that, maybe you would like to do your bandhas on inhalation. On the other hand, if you want them to be helpful to massage your internal organs, probably you want to do your Uddiyana on exhalation.

Do I understand it correctly, Uddiyana on exhale is not only passive lifting a diaphragm, but also active pressing of abdomen against the spine?

Yes, pinning of abdomen against the spine.

So Uddiyana on inhale, it is only pressing abdomen against the spine, because you cannot lift the diaphragm?

But there would be pressure there, you see. What I am trying to say, we do the Jalandhara Bandha, and then you got the air inside your chest. When you try to pull Uddiyana Bandha, it may be not as deep, but at the same time we produce enormous amount of pressure inside your chest. That way they say the Apana is moved up, and you get the union between these two, that's the idea. You can't lift the diaphragm as much as you can during Bahya Kumbhaka, it may be a negligible movement, but at the same time you will be able to feel the pressure. I don't know why

it is mentioned there, I've not been taught that, but he said, it is not for us. Because he was not talking in terms of the Kundalini Yoga, Prana, Apana through Sushumna and all that. He was using Uddiyana Bandha, Mula Bandha, for the six koshas of the body. If you look at it from this point of view, it appears to be very logical. It all depends on who is asking you to do what.

I guess it is confusing to me because on exhale the diaphragm is relaxed, and this normally continues in Bahya Kumbhaka, where as during inhale, it is contracted, and after inhale completed, in Antar Kumbhaka, it can be either left contracted, or be relaxed.

Yes, but increasing chest pressure is what they are wanting to do - they wanted to get Prana and Apana closer.

Jalandhara Bandha. How did he teach it?

In Jalandhara Bandha, he showed me, saying, "get the chin to the breast bone, and then pull it up." Try to bring chin down, he would say four inches below the neck pit, some of the texts talk about it. Then lock the chin, and then straighten your back. What happens is the whole chest moves up along with it. And that is the correct Jalandhara Bandha.

And this bandha is let go once you start inhaling or exhaling?

Yes. The main thing you want to do it when spine is straight, while you hold your breath, that is during kumbhaka. You inhale, bring your chin down, pull it up and lift your chest. During this kumbhaka period, Antar Kumbhaka, you maintain Jalandhara Bandha. In Bahya Kumbhaka also, you bring it down down and pull it up. In Bahya Kumbhaka you maintain Jalandhara Bandha, Mula Bandha, and Uddiyana Bandha. The bandhas are very important during kumbhaka period. Naturally during inhale or exhale you will relax your bandha, but still you have to control the breath. You still control the breath by maintaining Jalandhara Bandha. You maintain the control with Jalandhara Bandha in Ujjai; you maintain the control with your fingers in Nadi Shoddana pranayama.

Jalandhara Bandha aids Ujjai.

Definitely! Jalandhara Bandha aids Ujjai. It also has a number of other benefits. It helps you to keep your back straighter. Once you pull up the spine, your Mula Bandha and Uddiyana Bandha also become more effective. Because the pelvic muscles are pulled up, there is more space between the pelvis and ribcage, so you are able to do the bandhas much better. They are all related.

What asanas recommended for its practice?

Usually Padmasana, Vajrasana are two main postures, which are helpful. You can do it in Maha Mudra, you can do it in Maha Bandha and all that. Sidhasana is very good for that too, you can keep the back much straighter.

What about practicing bandhas during inversions?

Yes, in Sarvangasana, Shirshasana - if you can develop good Mula Bandha and Uddiyana Bandha it is helpful, both from the Kundalini point of view, and for helping your body koshas.

Jalandhara Bandha is natural during the Shoulderstand and the Plough.

Yes, Jalandhara Bandha is natural during the shoulderstand. But it is better than in the Plough, because you keeping your whole body up. You don't get a gravity advantage in your Halasana. If you want to work with Jalandhara Bandha, you can do it in Halasana. But there is no point for staying in Halasana for 15 minutes, as you are able to stay in Sarvangasana. Benefits you will be able to get for staying in shoulderstand for 15 minutes are entirely different from what you will probably get with Jalandhara Bandha in Halasana.

What about Viparita Karani?

Viparita Karani is just an intermediate procedure for a shoulderstand, so your legs and the whole body can relax, and then get into a proper shoulderstand.

How is Drishti used in Vinyasa Krama?

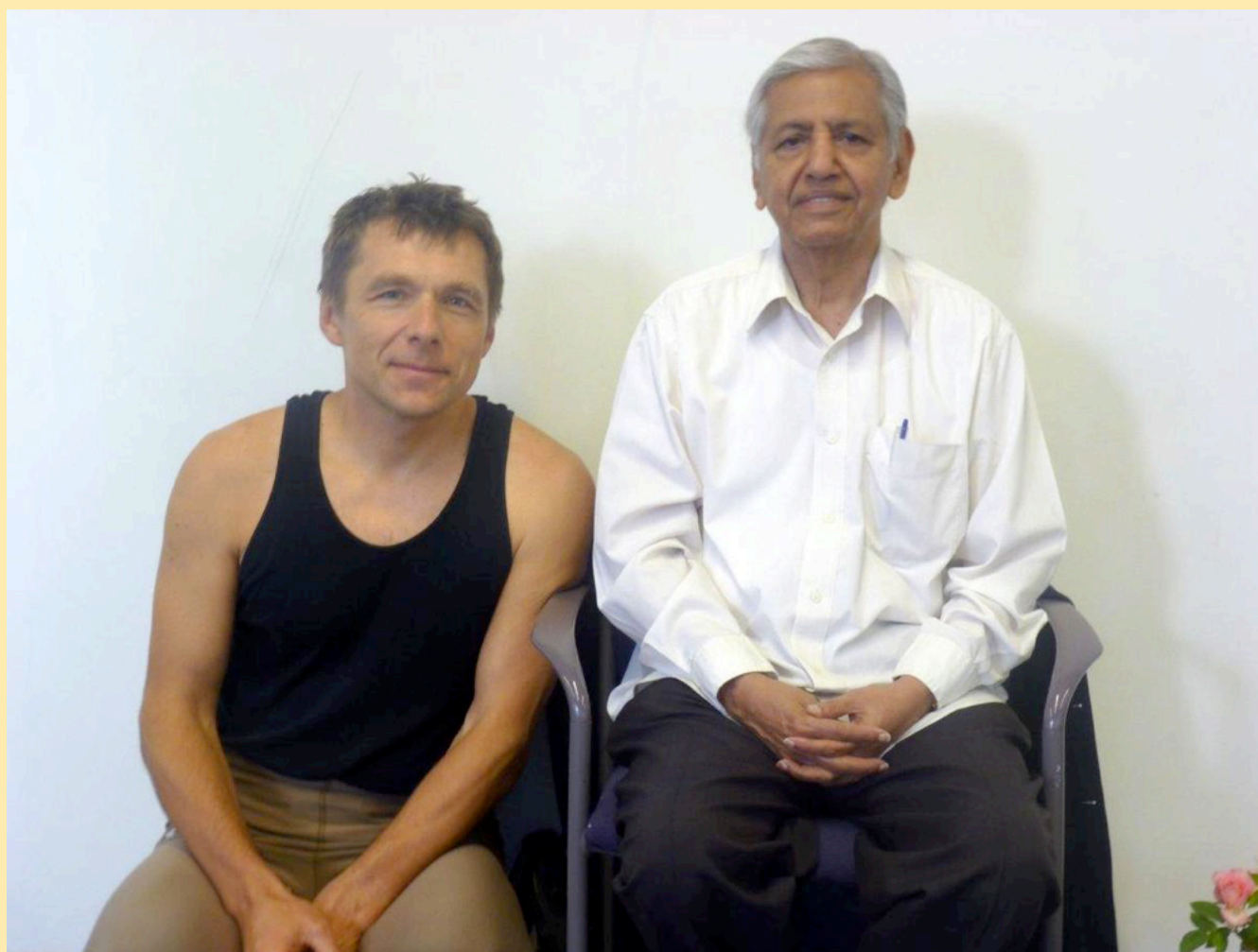
Drishti is mentioned in many of Pattabhi Jois works, but for all those years I've been studied with Krishnamacharya, he never mentioned about Drishti. He never mentioned about it. Only thing he will say, whenever you do Trataka you gaze at the lamp, and then internalize it. That's about all. But whether you must look at the toe, and all that I find, that kind of thing he never mentioned. Keep your head down, and your eyes closed. Most of the time our eyes are closed, we are following the breath. Most of the asanas you keep the eyes closed and work with the breath. Concentrate on breath, except in standing poses. When you are doing Paschimottanasana, you better have your eyes closed, so that you will be able to focus on the breath and the bandhas. Everything is happening inside, you don't need to keep your eyes open.

Did Krishnamacharya teach Jihwa Bandha, Kechari Mudra?

No, no. Whenever we do Ujjai breathing, we will ask you to roll the tongue back.

But that is not comparable to the real Kechari Mudra, it is much deeper.

No, no, no. All those things mentioned in Hatha Yoga Pradipika, or Yoga Makaranda, - any of the fancy things you find in those books - undercutting the tongue, or the Neti Pot, or the Sutra Neti, all that he mentioned in Yoga Makaranda, he did not teach in the later years. And people won't do it in India. He was not teaching yogis, he was teaching ordinary people, you know. Ordinary people were coming, and I was part of that gang. You go and study. Fortunately over the period of time, I developed interest in that. I think I had a very deep interest in the subject. Otherwise, most people... He won't be teaching all these things. And then he was not teaching teachers. He did not try to develop teachers or anything. During his later part of his years, he was teaching to people whatever is required for a particular individual.



Yuri Sharonin & Shrivatsa Ramaswami

Why didn't he teach yoga teachers, or yogis? Prepare, so to speak, a replacement for himself?

No, the whole thing is, we have a different impression about him, as some... But he, at that time,

what he was trying to do - he was in Mysor, he has come to Madras, and what do you do? There are not many people who want to become yogis, yoga teachers. Even now in India, yoga teachers... It is completely different. What is going on in the West is different from what is going on in India. Nowadays a few people are interested because it is more popular in the West. In my time, you don't even tell anyone that you are practicing yoga. The elders used to discourage it, they think you will become a recluse. Lots of misconceptions were there in India at that time. It was very difficult to get married if you were to become a yoga teacher at that time. He had to teach for anybody wants to come to him and wanted to learn something. And he would teach. Most of the people never knew what he was capable of. Nobody knew. They would come, take few lessons and go away. A few people, like us, got interested in that. Because of our own personal interest. I wanted to know what it is all about. Not because you wanted to become teacher, or become this, or that. I wanted to know. He was the man who can give you the knowledge that you need.

What about Dharana and Dhyana? Since they are entirely internal practices, antaranga sadhana, and teacher's options are quite limited. How did he teach?

Not much here that he would teach. See, what I was found with him, rather than teaching Dharana, Dhyana directly, he started teaching the Chanting. I think I told you, chanting also helps your mind to become focused. You take a particular chapter; the chapter has got a theme. As you chant, if you know the meaning, you are able to get this particular theme in your mind. For instance, Pancha Kosha Vidya in the Taiitriya Upanishad, it slowly leads you, from Annamaya Kosha, to Pranamaya Kosha, to Manomaya Kosha... Like that it leads you... So if you chant for fifteen minutes, you have done a meditation on that.

It develops Ekagrata [focus]?

Yes, instead of taking a mantra and repeating it, - that's one way of getting your mind focused - now you take one particular concept, one particular idea, and then you remain focused on that. The same approach is done in the Puja also. You take one Akriti, one particular deity you want to meditate upon, that has a physical form, that helps you to bring your mind to it, then you do Archana to it [chanting names of the deity], then it helps you to do Akara Dhyana [form of a meditation]. There are hundreds of methods by which this can be done. The one that we do is one method, it is not the only method. If you are Bhakti Yogi, you don't have to go through all this. That's why he would say, there is only one Dhyana, Bhagavad Dhyana. If you are doing Bhagavad Dhyana, start doing all these things. Every day for 15 minutes or half an hour, if you are doing Bhagavad Dhyana, it can be a Puja, it can be Akara Dhyana, or chanting sahasranama, a thousand names of a particular deity, like that. I thought he was insisting more and more along these lines,

rather than going through the various parts of Patanjali. Because either you go through Bhakti Marga [path of devotion] or Jnana Marga [path of knowledge].

This is in addition to practice of Dharana, Dhyana?

He taught that you practice it. But he also brought all these other things. So if you really look at him, he did a lot, he did a lot to develop your Ekagrata, he did a lot for your meditation. He did not stop with taking a mantra and asking to do your Dharana, Dhyana, because other mantras are also available. It is also a very conventional way. And then the problem with most people of other backgrounds is that it will be difficult for them to do the chanting; it will be difficult for them to attach to this kinds of practice. In such cases it is better to go through Patanjali's procedure. He taught both of the methods. But I prefer after some time to go through the chanting procedure. I chant and meditate upon that. Surya Namaskara you chant for one hour. Entire one hour your mind will be on that. You can't think of anything else.

It is peculiar that here in the West, people seeking to start meditation practice come to Vedantic or Buddhist meditation, and think of Yoga only as a source of health benefits. Why do you think that is? Why not Yogic Meditation?

The whole problem is, nobody teaches that. Nobody teaches the yogic meditation. You look at some older teachers, they don't teach meditation at all. So people who practice Yoga, when they want meditation, because meditation is mentioned there, what do they do? They have to go to Vedantic school, because they can teach some Vedantic mantras, like Aham Brahmaasmi, So-Ham, Shivo-Ham, and all that. Or, they go to Buddhist meditation, or, sometimes they take a mantra. They go to religious people, take a mantra, and trying to meditate.

It may be that the format of typical yoga studio does not allow it. You have 1.5 hour class, and it is invariably a drop-in. It is very difficult to teach Pranayama or Meditation to someone who just shows up.

It is true, but at the same time the studio can offer programs on Pranayama, or Meditation. If you come to study yoga for three years, if you say, I am going to teach Pranayama, a few people may be interested. Have one class every week, whereas you can have classes all through the week for asanas. Have one class for Pranayama, then slowly introduce the Meditation. Then it will grow. Once two or three people will study Pranayama, and they will practice... It goes the same way with asanas. If people won't teach, it won't spread. Unfortunately this will not be done, because most teachers have not studied Pranayama, so they can't teach. And they won't let anybody else come and teach Pranayama. You will ask them, how to learn Pranayama, and they will say, oh, it is

dangerous. Because they can't teach. I am telling you, the reason why Pranayama is not taught, is not nearly because it is considered to be dangerous, but because they not taught about it. It is not so difficult if you apply your mind to it. All yoga teachers can learn safe simple Pranayama and teach. First you learn it for your personal practice, because you need Pranayama to teach it. And then when you go to yoga school to learn some yoga asanas, there should be a provision for it, there should be some classes available. Unfortunately it is completely shut out here.

Is it different in India?

In India, again, asana people practice only asanas. There is no seriousness. And then yoga is not practiced with so much of enthusiasm as it is done here. Krishnamacharya has taught Pranayama, that is all I know. How can his students, and thousands of thousands of people who follow them say they are following Krishnamacharya traditions? But they don't do Pranayama. They say, "don't do Pranayama, it is dangerous." It is not fair to Krishnamacharya ,his teaching.

Can you describe the Vinyasa Krama, the method you are teaching? It's uniqueness?

Vinyasa Krama is a method, by which you do asanas, with a number of movements leading to asanas, movements in the asanas, counterposes to the asanas. And then all the asanas are done with a proper breathing. There is an appropriate breathing for each of these movements. And then the mind is focused on the breath. These are the main differences between Vinyasa Krama and other methods. The term Vinyasa means Art. Vinyasa Krama is practicing yoga as an Art. That's why it got so many movements. All of the various movements body can do, falling within common definition of asana. One more advantage of Vinyasa Krama is that you are able to access different parts of the body, which you won't do, if you doing fixed number of movements, fixed number of asanas. There are so many different movements, you are likely to reach and exercise all parts of the body. Prana goes to those areas, Rakta [blood] goes to those areas.

How does Vinyasa Krama relate to Chikitsa Krama [therapeutic approach to practice]?

Vinyasa Krama, if you learn and practice it, will give you a lot more, the bigger base for you to apply in Chikitsa Krama. Because in Vinyasa Krama we have, say about 700 vinyasas or so. If you want to teach somebody for a particular condition, you can study the patient, and then try to pick and choose. Those vinyasas are going to be helpful. But if you learned only a few asanas, then you don't have that scope. Again, if you have Vinyasa Krama, then you can teach for different people: young people, old people, middle-aged people. There is no need to have a same structure that you teach to youngsters, and then ask old people to perform it. Of course in a group class, like the teacher training, some people may find it difficult to do a difficult posture. But at least they

will know, that when they would teach youngsters, they will have enough material to teach them. At the same time, when if they need to teach older people, they have enough material to teach accordingly.

How does Vinyasa Krama relates to long hold asanas?

Long hold asanas are there, because they require time to give proper benefits. You want to go into shoulderstand, headstand, you have to stay there for a long period of time, because if you stay for only a minute, the body won't relax. It takes time for a body to relax; it takes time for internal muscles to relax and then move, so you have to provide time for that. That's why we give more time for headstand, shoulderstand, and also for Paschimottanasana.

In his early works, Krishnamacharya recommends 10-15 asanas [held for a long time] for a regular practice. You mentioned he asked four asanas for constant long hold practice: Maha Mudra, Paschimottanasana, Sarvangasana, and Sirsasana.

Yes, that is what I remember, because, for instance, he also talks, for example, about Mayurasana in the Yoga Makaranda. But I remember these four. He would insist, almost every day he would ask us to do these four asanas.

Do you think this reduction in number of poses was due to maximizing effectiveness, or a concession to students?

No, no. You are required to do vinyasas. There are number of movements you will do. Everyday practice consists of dynamic movements, and also static postures. Among the static postures, he would say these four are important. My practice should have a number of movements and also should have these postures. I can't just go on for an hour and just keep on moving. Nor remain in one posture for a long period of time. I have to have a mixture of these two. The reason why I have to do movements, I have to access different parts of the body. The human body is so unique. Each part has its own set of movements. So what yogis are done, they came up with all the movements the body can do, so we can access all parts of the body. I have to find out the way so I can exercise the whole body. And that's what they have done. Why do you want to stay in those static postures for a long period of time? Because these postures take time to give you benefits. I will keep it in mind and adjust the practice in such a way. In addition, Pranayama was another must.

He practiced Maha Mudra as one of the main poses. Did he practiced it by itself, or with conjunction with Maha Bandha, and Maha Vedha, as text recommends?

Basically he would teach only Maha Mudra, followed by Badha Konasana. He was teaching Maha Mudra to almost everybody. Usually about 5 minutes on each side. Normally he would say number of breaths, "do twelve breaths." If a breath is short it will take a short time, if the breath is long, it will take a longer period of time. Twelve breaths for five minutes is quite acceptable.

How specific was Krishnamacharya in Vinyasa sequences? Did he require to stick to a particular sequence, or did he encourage variations?

Yes, he would teach you the way I go about teaching this class. Once you learned these vinyasas, then in your own practice you will pick and choose on a daily basis. That is your responsibility. But, on the other hand, if you come to me for a treatment, then I will pick and choose the vinyasas and give it to you. But if you are doing it for yourself, and you had learned these vinyasas, then you have to design your program on a daily basis. You don't need a teacher to come and tell you. I've done this, tomorrow I think I should do something for my neck and shoulders, or sometimes I feel heavy in my legs, so I probably spend more time doing vinyasas in my shoulderstand, or headstand. I vary my procedures from day to day.

Did he taught Surya Namaskar, was it a part of a daily practice? You mentioned earlier it was a part of weekly routine.

No, no. That was a chanting, not the physical aspect. Just a chanting. We used to do only chanting part. We never used to do the physical part. He taught it, but then he never insisted on a physical part of the Surya Namaskar. Not as it is being done in the West.

So physical Surya Namaskar sequence was not practiced at all?

No, no. It was just taught out, that's about all.

Even the physical Surya Namaskar sequence you taught us is quite different from what I practiced before in Ashtanga-Vinyasa-style practice – it is slow, done with long kumbhakas while mantra is chanted, and includes prostration. In effect, it is a Samantraka Pranayama.

Yes, because these mantras are there, Surya Namaskara mantras. He was insisting on mantra portion more than the physical portion.

So he did not taught sequences like Surya Namaskara, or Ding Namaskara.

Ding Namaskara he taught. That's why I teach it. Because, we do Ding Namaskara on a daily basis, in our morning procedure, I told you. You do it every day. It is done anyway. The mantras are there already. The only thing, instead of doing it in haphazard way, he brought out a system. He just organized it.

Things like Chandra Namaskara?

I've never heard of Chandra Namaskara. Surya Namaskara he merely taught, but he did not insist. He did not make it a part of regular practice. There is a big difference with doing 108 Surya Namaskara. But then Hatha Yoga Pradipika commentary clearly says: "don't overexert your body with heavy weight lifting, or doing multiple Surya Namaskaras". It clearly says that. Read the commentary to Hatha Yoga Pradipika. He uses the term Kaya Klesha. What makes Kaya Klesha? Pain. Kaya means body. What are the examples of that? Bahu bhara vahanam carrying very heavy weights. Then the second will be Surya Namaskara. Bahu Surya Namaskara. He didn't say, "don't do Surya Namaskara" - but don't do too many Surya Namaskara, which will exert the system.

How specific he was about alignment, in any vinyasas or asanas?

He would make minor adjustments. Few minor adjustments I've made in the class, similarly to that he will do. [very minor, gentle physical touch, rare; occasional verbal suggestions.] Supposing your shoulderstand is very uncomfortable, so he would come and help you out. But it won't be rough. Not a very meticulous kind of adjustment to the posture.

Some things, especially after Ashtanga Vinyasa-like practice, look odd in Vinyasa Krama. For instance, legs together in Adho Mukha Svanasana; flexing a knee more than 90 degrees in Virabhadrasana sequence, Uthita Prasvakonasana; Jalandhara Bandha in Urdva Mukha Shvanasana; different sthiti in Trikonasana.

When you jump through your hands and you cross your legs, or bring legs one after the other, there will be asymmetry. You will have to shift to one hand and then to the other hand. If you want to maintain symmetry you got to keep your legs together. It is better to keep the legs together and do all these movements, rather than allowing them to flay without any control.

Hips seems to open better if legs are apart and internally rotated.

No, but then hips also need to be closed. That is another position for the hips. Why they should always be open? Normally when you walk you keep your hips open. When do you keep the legs together? Tadasana requires you to keep your feet together. You better off to keep your feet

together and do the entire sequence.

For instance, the Iyengar school insists that knee does not over-project forward.

Oh yes. If you properly keep your feet position, a good base, not overextended, and not a narrow base, you got a stable position so you can do these movements properly. If you are overextended, it is not going to be helpful. That is not a critical aspect. Maybe for some people, sometime... The critical aspect is that I am able to stretch. I am not saying that everybody should project the knee out. If that is going to be helpful for me to lower my body and get to a Virabhadrasana properly, I may as well do it. I won't make it an issue at all. I won't make a forward knee position an issue in Virabhadrasana, Uthita Parsvakonasana. I think it is more stable if your knee goes forward. I've never been told that this should be a factor to be considered at all.

As long as the knee does not projects to the side?

No, no, that has to be straight! You should not move the knee inward or outward, it should be straight. The movement is lateral.

Was Krishnamacharya teaching Jalandhara Bandha in Urdva Mukha Svanasana, Adho Mukha Svanasana?

Yes, you can see it in his book also. In fact, I would say that default position of the head is head down – any posture. Unless you are required to turn your head, or take head back – otherwise you keep the head down. That keeps your neck relaxed, your back is straighter. And it is going to aid your balance, if you keep the head down. Stretching of the spine is easier, if you keep your head down. A lot of importance is given, advantages are there if you keep the head down. If you keep the chin down, the you can stretch the spine better. I got to lock the chin, it is a very beautiful procedure, for you to pull up the spine. Jalandhara Bandha pulls the whole chest up, along with that the spine pulled up. If you keep head straight, you need somebody to come and pull up your waist, or pull up your ribcage.

In your opinion, why Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga follows strict sequences, no variations allowed? Pattabhi Jois was stating that he was teaching strictly according with Krishnamacharya tradition.

Right. I can only speculate. One is that Krishnamacharya taught only those vinyasas at that particular time. They belong to much earlier group, 1940s maybe. And another thing, it is all depends on how long they studied. I studied with Krishnamacharya for a long, long period of

time. I specifically asked him for more vinyasas, when I started teaching. I realized that that I was not able to teach much more, so I went and asked him, are there more vinyasas? I said, I am not able to teach my students, is there something more? Yes, then he started, “did you teach this vinyasa, this other vinyasa”. Like that, he kept on teaching more and more... I used to practice, and then go and teach.

How many new vinyasas would he teach?

No, it is all went on for a long period of time. One class I would learn these vinyasas, I will go and teach. Maybe the next class, or two or three classes he will teach another set of vinyasas. Like that it went on and on for a long period of time. This opportunity some of the earlier teachers did not have.

Do you have any observations on how Krishnamacharya was able to provide an individual instructions for a diverse group, such as in your family, and otherwise.

Because of background, because of enormous knowledge he had. He knew how to apply it to individuals. He would study the person, and then design what is required for him or her. In fact, he used to say that everyone should have a capacity to draw from this and then adopt the procedure on a daily basis. You can't mindlessly practice yoga. You have to know, “why am I doing this particular procedure?”, “what does it do for me?”, “if I change it, what will happen?” You can change any of these vinyasas, provided you know why you are changing it. That kind of attention and that kind of application is necessary for a practitioner. You can't mindlessly practice the same thing over and over again. In any walk of life, you can't blindly do the same thing over and over again, you must know why you are doing it. Likewise, there should be some understanding, why am I doing this? Is it only to see how it feels, does it affect my body, does it give me any benefit? If I know this, then my practice becomes more and more intelligent, if I can use the term. That is why you need adaptation on the daily basis. I feel more tamasic, let me do more Pranayama today. I feel more energetic, I will do more vinyasas today. This kind of thought should be in my daily practice.

Does practice needs a plan?

You need a plan, yes. You think about it, plan it, then execute it. Daily practice need not be the same, because you change. Some days you are lazy, some days energetic, some people very pensive, immersed in thoughts. This is my advice: if you really want to make personal progress, and also be able to share with other people – don't stop with asanas. I am not saying – don't do asanas. Don't stop with asanas. I feel very sorry for people who practice Yoga for ten years, and

then after ten years they know only asanas, nothing else.

How hard the practice should be? Where should be the balance between making an effort and centering on your inner peace? How did Krishnamacharya managed this? Did he sometimes make you work harder?

When I was young, naturally he would ask me to do more and more vinyasas. As you get older, he said, try to cut down on your vinyasa practice. Try to do more of the stable postures, and then also start doing a lot of Pranayama. Then, chanting, meditation, all of them become part of your practice. Asanas are still there, but they are not the major part of the exercise. When you were young, that was the major part. During the middle part of the life, when I was working and running around, and all these things, he started slowly introducing all of these things – study of the texts, chanting, more and more pranayama, and the stable postures... They take over.

Was this a meaning of the title of your book, “Yoga for Three Stages of Life”?

Yes, that's right. In fact, that is what he mentioned in Yoga Rahasya also. You can't teach the same practice to everybody.

Can you tell a bit more about your books?

The first writings I did for a journal, called Indian Review journal. I think it was way back in 1978 or so. At that time I was a trustee of Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram (KYM). When the Mandiram started, I was one of the trustees. Desikachar, myself, and one of his class fellows, we were all the trustees. So at that time, what we did, Desikachar said, we should publish to make Mandiram known, and this particular magazine was interested. He asked me to write those articles, so I started writing. In about six months time I got out of Mandiram. But the publishers said, why don't you keep on writing? I went on writing, it went on for about 28 months or so. First few issues I used to type the article, give it to Desikachar, and he would, whenever find time, read it to his father, explain it to him. And then he would make suggestions. Not corrections, suggestions. He used to be very happy about what was going on. Then after a few years, one of the Desikachar students, Paul Harvey from the UK who studied Yoga Sutras with me at that time, asked me to write a book, an introductory book on Yoga Sutras.

So I wrote a book called “Basic Tenets of Patanjala Yoga”. It was not a great success, not many people read that. When the book was published in 1982, I was not going to classes for three-four months, I had something going on. But when Krishnamacharya came to know about it, he came all the way to my house. One Sunday, he and Desikachar came to my house, I was surprised. He said, “I understand you have written a book, and I want to bless you. It is a very good thing, you

must write more books.” He was very positive, very supportive. He used to encourage you very well. So he wanted Vinyasa Krama, he wanted these teachings be known.

At that time, Pattabhi Jois and Iyengar were teaching, but not directly in contact with him; Desikachar started to go to different parts of the world. He was very supportive. And then another thing started doing, I first recorded the Yoga Sutras, then wanted to have a recording company do it. Ultimately I was able to find a Recording company, they recorded it and released it. Then subsequently they asked me to come up with a number of other subjects. So over the period of 15 years, most of the chanting I have learned from Krishnamacharya I was able to record about 30 in all, about 30 hrs of Sanskrit chants, and this company released it. This was another important aspect of Krishnamacharya's teaching.

These were two early publications. Then in 1999-2000 I wrote “Yoga for the Three Stages of Life”, and in 2005 I wrote “The Complete Book of Vinyasa Yoga”, a Vinyasa Krama book, and in 2006 a book with David Hurwitz, “Yoga Beneath the Surface”. These are the publications. And subsequently, I started to send Vinyasa Krama newsletters, so I can share whatever I consider is important. It was good to keep on writing, one way or the other.

What do you think is your best work so far?

Of course “Yoga for the Three Stages of Life”, I really, really enjoyed writing it. But then Vinyasa Krama book is also good. Reason why I wrote this particular book, is that I found that even though I go and teach workshops, not many people heard about it. I thought I will not teach, so I wanted to put everything I knew in form of the book, and publish it, so it is out of my mind. And then LMU fortunately started this program [LMU 200 hr Teacher Training with Srivatsa Ramaswami in LA, California, USA]. Few people now had studied this. And then book with David was good – I could see what kind of questions arise in people, that was good.

It is a wonderful format, Q&A.

Yes. We started without intent to write a book. He asked me, can I ask a few questions? I agreed, he sent me an email, I replied, he kept them with himself. Then after some time, after I wrote a Vinyasa Krama book, I asked him; David put the whole thing in a form of the book, and we submitted it to a publisher. Initially they hesitated, but ultimately, published it.

Any other books, besides essential scriptures, that should be studied?

As yoga teachers you must be familiar with various texts. Bhagavad Gita, Hatha Yoga Pradipika,

Yoga Yajnavalkya – these three texts... Yoga Upanishads are there, but they are not very accessible, some of them are repetitive. You can still have a look at them. This is all with respect to Hatha Yoga. There is also other text – it is not a text, it is part of the Purana – it is called Sutra Samhita. It is not very important, just an additional material.

Then you can probably think about Samkhya Karika. It is work of 75 shlokas or so, like Yoga Sutras it is also very concise, and a beautifully written text. Lot of things that are taken for granted in Yoga Sutras can be found there. For instance, the three Gunas, the evolution from the Mulah Prakriti explained very well, Transmigration; number of other concepts that are taken for granted by yogis can be found there. English translations are available; English commentaries are also available. Samkhya is one of the six traditional Indian Philosophies. Samkhya, Yoga, and Vedanta form a compact group. They all talk about Nivriti Shastras – how to stop the Transmigration.

Go through the Yoga Sutras, get a good outline of that, then try to support it by Bhagavad Gita from one side, and Samkhya Karika on the other side. Bhagavad Gita will be very helpful, because it is very “user-friendly”, not like the Yoga Sutras. Yoga Sutras are very dry – Bhagavad Gita tries to explain. In fact, you don't need any commentary for it, because same ideas explained over and over again. Arjuna was a warrior, not an intellectual.

Then once you are familiar with these texts, then you can read some of the Upanishads, Upanishad Vidyas. Vedas per se might not be of much importance to us. It contains lot of rituals, things like this. More important thing for people who study Yoga is to study Upanishads. The Upanishads portions is the Thought, philosophical ideas are contained there, and there are many.

Can you give some advice on approaching Upanishads study?

There is one called Chandogya Upanishad, another one called Brhadaranyaka Upanishad. Katha Upanishad is another Upanishad that is very important. Another important Upanishad is Prashna Upanishad. It is a series of questions and answers. Smaller ones are Taittiriya Upanishad - Panchakosha Vidya discusses 5 koshas (sheaths): Annamaya, Pranamaya, Manomaya, Anandamaya, Vijnanamaya, Anandamaya. They are dealt with in Taittiriya Upanishad. Again, it is the same subject, but approached in a different way: body made of 5 koshas, like in Yoga Sutras we have 24 Tattvas (principles). Then there is another Upanishad, called Mandukya Upanishad; it talks of the meaning of Pranava Mantra, Om. Om divided to 3 phases, states (Avasthas), A-U-M. Akara related to a waking state (Jagrat), Ukara – dream state (Svapna), and Makara is a deep sleep state (Sushupti). Omkara, AUM is the state that is beyond all three, called Turiya-avastha, or Turiya-samadhi. These ideas are taken up in the Mandukya Upanishad, and commentaries been

written. This is another important Upanishad Krishnamacharya taught.

In Chandogya Upanishad there is a Vidya called Sat Vidya. Sat means “that which is true, unchanging, permanent, or that which exists”. That refers to anything that exist forever - Brahman or the Ultimate Reality, according to them. The way they go about explaining it, it is all anecdotes – it is a nice story. It is a dialog between father and son. The son goes to the teacher and excels, after studying for a number of years. Then he comes home proud of this knowledge, thinking his father doesn't know anything. His father gets upset of his attitude, and teaches him a lesson, teaches him. It is a beautiful story. In that they say main Mahavakya (great pronouncement), called “tat tvam asi”. Tat is the Ultimate Reality, Tvam “you are one of the same”. There is another Vidya called Bhuma Vidya. There are number of them. Same idea, but they are trying to put it in so many different ways. I asked my teacher, “There is only one Brahman, why are there so many different Vidyas?” He said, it all depends on attitude of different people. Different people – different questions arise. They tried so many ways to put across the idea... If you like, go and buy a book on Upanishads, and then look for these Vidyas. Otherwise what happens, you give it a general reading, there are a lot of things that may not be of much interest to us.

There is also another Upanishad I told you about, Brhadaranyaka Upanishad. It has another Vidya, Madhu Vidya. Madhu means the sweetest part of the flower, nectar. In that, they try to tell you what is the sweetest thing – again they go to the Brahman. It is where Sage Yajnavalkya tells his wife he was going to partition his property and become a recluse. I've told you this story. So there are stories, sometimes direct discussion between a teacher and the student, that way they made it very interesting.

Take some of the Upanishads, try to find out which interpretation you like, whether it is Vashishtadvaita, or Advaita, or Dvaita. Advaita seems to be most popular, more and more books has been written on that.

So like that, you take one of these, and then when time permits, try to go understand. You can interest yourself by studying Upanishads, doing one Upanishad after the other. Because you may not find teachers straight away, it may be a good idea to read them, try to find a book that explains them in easily understandable terms. Just don't go to the scholarly/academic works, they are going to make it difficult.

In 2010 or so, there were 5000 yoga teachers registered with Yoga Alliance in the USA, countless others are not registered. Do you find modern teacher preparation satisfactory?

At my stage of life, what I want to do is to be able to teach what I know. If the few people can learn... You see, it is very difficult, people come with different expectations. Different teachers teach different approaches, so many different practices are there. What I can do is to teach what I

had studied with my teacher. Whatever I practiced, whatever I thought about that. That is all I can do. Initially, when I came here, I thought, now you teach what you want, others may teach what they want. It is ultimately up to the people to find out what is good for them and practice.

Do you feel that someone with a serious practice of several years has a duty to teach?

My feeling is, anybody who practicing Yoga for five years should start thinking about it. Where am I going, what I am trying to do? Some introspection is necessary. You can't just keep doing the same thing over and over again. That is not an intelligent approach to Yoga. You try to find out, what else is there in Yoga. Suppose somebody says, don't do Pranayama - why you should not do Pranayama? Or if somebody says, don't do shoulderstand – what are the problems? Why shouldn't I do shoulderstand? Otherwise it is all the same routine. As they get older, it will not going to be helpful, I am sure. Practices that are good when you are young will not be helpful when you get older. You need a different set of practices.

How did your teaching career proceed?

I was teaching in India, in the Dance School. It was mostly dealing with youngsters. There was no scope for teaching other things. It was asanas, asanas, over and over again. It went on for about 20 years. I did not have much opportunity to teach Philosophy. When I started teaching here, I asked University (LMU) if I can also teach it. This program (TT) has Yoga Sutras. I've taught Samkhya Karika a couple of time here. One or two Upanishads. Mandukya Upanishad... Like that, I was able to teach, what was not possible back then. Because it was a school, a junior college. Basically, children. I've taught some one-on-one, but not much. That is what Desikachar told me, “you seem to work with groups”, whereas he was concentrating on one-to-one basis, like his father was doing. But then Krishnamacharya was teaching groups when he was in Mysore. It so happened, because I went on to school to teach.

You are teaching for more than thirty years now. How did your teaching evolve?

When I first started teaching, I was concentrating on teaching asanas. I hesitated teaching Pranayama, hesitated teaching Mantras. Hesitated talking about philosophies. Initially, first few years were just asanas. I hesitated to talk about all that. Slowly I started to teach that, now I am comfortable. It lets you teach as wide a spectrum of yoga practices as possible. I find more people liking aspects of yoga that are not fancy – people are able to settle down for the Pranayama, for the Yoga Sutra class. All these things are happening. These things interested me when I studied with Krishnamacharya. I always felt there should be few people with a similar temperament that I have. By and large, people who come to my program seem to be interested.

Nobody said “what is this fellow talking about?” That is good. I am sure, that just because this appeals to me, there should be a few people around who may have a similar temperament, to whom this may appeal. So what I should do is keep on teaching, as many people as possible. If they like that approach - good, well and good.

Like attracts like, student find his/her own teacher.

Yes, if I feel that it has something to offer to me, then I will like it.

Can you please share your opinion about sources of modern Hatha Yoga? All Indian schools widely known in the West, trace their origins from Sri T. Krishnamacharya, Swami Shivananda, Dharendra Brahmachari. We know only names of their Gurus. Further lineage is invariably unknown. On the face value, lineage of modern yoga can be traced no further than 19th century. Natha order Natha Sampradaya that authored medieval Hatha Yoga scriptures are not practicing Hatha Yoga for several centuries now, and does not teaching it in their ashrams. There is also a modern research, which suggests that Asana practice adopted a lot from modern western bodily exercises.

My Guru used to say that lots of the written works of that period are lost. They used to be written on palm leaves, many are Agraharam (habitats with scholars), Agraharam means that almost in every village used to be a yogi who would have written about his own experiences. In fact, in early part of my studies with him, one day he said, you people should go out into the villages, and then find out people who practice yoga. They all may have different personal experiences, or how they develop asanas, and all that. But then, unfortunately, all of them are lost. I am not saying this because of the materials are not available, but because books were not written, until about a hundred years back. Where are the books? Even in the western world, where are the books? Books are written only recently. In fact, if you look at Indian background, Puranas written a long time back, those texts are available, if you really look for old sources on yoga, they are available only in India. And then if you look at some very very old texts, like Puranas, Smritis, and Vedas, Asanas are mentioned. If you look at Ramayana, Rama was supposedly sitting in Virasana, the first shloka of Valmiki Ramayana says. It means Virasana was known at that time. But lots of details were lost. Just because we don't have it, it does not mean they were not available. Most of them were Karna Parampara. Take the Vedas, you learn from the teacher, there is no written records on that. Just because there is no written records you cannot say it does not exist. These are very big mistakes these modern scholars are making. They say the way Krishnamacharya teach is only a hundred years old. I don't know. Krishnamacharya used to say he taught according to traditions. I tend to believe him more. And then look at some very old books, very very old books. Yoga Sutras. Brahma Sutras says that one should sit in the yogic posture before asana for

a meditation. The Padmasana is mentioned by Puranas. I don't believe just because no records are available it was not there. I don't have my financial records 20 years back. If somebody would ask me in the court, what happened? I do not have them. That does not mean it didn't happen.

It is common knowledge that Patanjali in Yoga Sutras defines asana as comfortable still pose for pranayama and meditation. Usually sitting postures.

Right, sitting postures.

Asanas as body exercises seems to originate from Natha Yoga. Do you think in old times these were entirely separate lineages of yoga? In your opinion, does modern Hatha Yoga merges these two traditions satisfactory?

Hatha Yoga and Raja Yoga? Even though Hatha Yoga says it leads to Raja Yoga, there are some people who specialize in Hatha Yoga. They develop more and more asanas. Several sages are supposed to have developed different asanas. The focus was on physical and physiological development, as far as Hatha Yogis were concerned. Raja Yogi was bent on more on ability to concentrate, with a spiritual development. There was a division on specialization, if you want to call it. But they were complementing each other. Raja Yogis say that unless your body physical health is maintained, physiologically you won't be able to control the mind. So they said, you practice asanas, and Pranayama, I don't want to mention it, because texts are available. There were teachers available that would teach you Asana and Hatha Yoga. I will concentrate on different aspects. That is why in Yoga Sutras, he did not talk much about asanas. But he gave a lot of importance to Yama Niyama. But Hatha Yoga Pradipika does not say anything substantial about Yama Niyama. They complement each other. There is no point in everyone writing about Asanas. Patanjali writing about asanas, Swatmarama writing about asanas, Puranas writing about asanas... There is a saying Anuktam anyato grahyam, if you don't find some information in the text, you go to a complementary text, and then you will be able to find that information. You have to study them in the group.

Do you feel these traditions merged in modern yoga satisfactory?

It is a specialization, I would say. Some people are specialized, and they are very good in that, so they developed that particular branch. At the same time they recognized that this is not the end of the story.

Can you share your thoughts on the future of Yoga – in the West and in India? Any observations on changes in spirituality and ideas of dharma in the modern world?

No. See, I will tell you this: Yoga is an old discipline. So what I would say is, if you want to teach Yoga, you must understand, what is there, what practiced there, what is the philosophy behind that, and then teach. If you would say, it is not necessary, I want to create my own yoga – call it Contemporary Yoga, and practice. It is up to you.

Do you feel like in the West people are reinventing the Yoga?

Yes, many people are now inventing Yoga, because they don't have access to tradition, like Krishnamacharya had. What happens – yoga is popular, so I run my own yoga, or stick to the same routine. I am not saying that everybody is doing it... At least in olden days, I used to know many people who come to India to study. Nowadays it is all gone. They say that “who knows Yoga in India? Now it has become established here.” My approach would be: alright, I had studied with Krishnamacharya, and the only reason I had stayed with him for a long period of time, was because he was interpreting the shastras with his experience to me. If he would have said, it is a yoga he is invented, I would not have gone to him. I would not have gone to him. Because I had wanted to know what was Yoga, Vedanta have to offer. I wanted to know that. And he faithfully interpreted those shastras to tell you what they are all about, which he did admirably. Whatever I understood from him, now I want to explain to people the way I understood. It is not as good as he taught, but that is the best I can do. I will do whatever I can do to explain the way I understood. And I should be happy about it.

What is your advice for those times when one feels uncertain, even discouraged about yoga practice, practice progression? Everyone has those moments at some point.

Right. I get that feeling quite often even now (laughs). It should not be frequent, it could happen once in a while. What I can tell you from my own experience, 90 people out of 100, when they start on Yoga, after some time they don't find any improvement whatsoever. “What am I doing? Why am I doing this?” That is why I would say, the reason why we are getting this feeling is, we are not getting everything that practice supposed to give. Yogis promise so much, but they are very sincere. They have no ax to grind, they tell you what they had experienced. The only problem, I am not able to experience it, that is the only thing – at least when I was young. The reason why it does not work for me is I don't know what they are talking about. Maybe I am not doing it properly, not understood it properly. I have to persist. That faith I must have in this. I had that faith in my Teacher. I have the faith in subject also. These two things you must have. That's what they call Shraddha (faith with love and reverence). So first starting point - you must have Faith. And then another thing, what happens in our life – sometimes there are other problems. They come into our life...

Here Yoga Philosophy comes more importantly. You try to understand Yoga Philosophy, what does it say about Three Gunas... One of the reasons sometimes we get more depressed, or more and more angry – that can be due to preponderance of other two Gunas: Rajas and Tamas. Philosophy is the only way they can help us. We must try to find out situations that causing these problems. Sometimes you must find a permanent solution for a chronic problem. All of us – we don't solve the problem, we expect it will go away. So we have to devise a solution, and then deal with it. Then there is certain problems which you cannot completely eliminate. Then you must at least learn to make use of Yoga so you can overcome those difficulties. Sometimes it can be Pranayama practice, sometimes it can be Asana practice. But to greatest extent – the Philosophy.

Personally, I will tell you: Yoga Philosophy, the Upanishads, they were very helpful. These thoughts contained there... You are able to see that those people in olden days – they were able to see those problems; it is nothing new to me. It has happened to many people earlier, only details may be different. All of us have our own set of problems. If we can make use of Yoga to deal with these problems better, it will be good. There is no other way. If we don't deal with the problems at this level, then we have to depend on external help. We must slowly try to see that these problems do not affect us. They may not go away completely, but at least they won't affect us so much. I am not saying it is going completely solve the problem, but to some extent Yoga Philosophy may be very very helpful. Like you, I too have or had my own problems, but it is much easier to deal with them, if you understand philosophy. Maybe Asana and Pranayama can help on physiological level. On psychological level you have to sit down and analyze. Frankly speaking, many problems we come across in life are of our own creation. When you solve the problems, you also have to give up certain things. You have to sit down and analyze, what do you want to give up, what do I want to get rid of. Analyze and choose a course. Sometimes, though, we take ourselves too seriously, and get affected by outside factors too much.

Practice sustained by Yoga Philosophy.

For the mind to become quiet, it should have an anchor. The mind should know it can be peaceful without any external things, things you depend upon, health, relationship. So long as everything OK, all is fine, but if something goes wrong, mind is shattered. I should not allow myself to get shattered. Once I allow it to get shattered, it is a big problem. It is very difficult to rebuild it. That is why these things will be helpful: Practice to some extent, Philosophy to some extent. Between them, mind is reinforced so I can deal with problems better. Mere Practice won't do.

Can any Philosophy support practice? Do we have a choice?

All practices must be supported by a strong philosophy. You must know why you are doing it.

Just because “I practice Yoga, it will do me good” – it is good. But to appreciate the whole thing – you must have a strong philosophy. That is why sooner or later – whether you like Upanishads, Buddhism, or Vedanta, or any other philosophy, I don't know about Western Philosophy, I think there should be something very strong, that is possible – some kind of a philosophy should be there. Personal philosophy you will have to develop. All these things will help. What you value most in life. We must have some kind of guiding philosophy in our life. Once you will be able to develop certain peace of mind in yourself, once you start valuing it more than other things – lots of problems will get solved. But Yoga Philosophy will help you to get this particular state of mind, which is not dependent on the external circumstances. I may be peaceful with a lot of money, with no money, with problems, or without problems – and this is to be maintained. But you have to believe in this philosophy, and I am not saying blindly follow philosophy. I want to give mind some peace – that is all I am trying to do. This we lack – I can give a lot of happiness, pleasure to the mind, I can do that. But I am not able to get right kind of peace. What is why I say, have your practice, do your Pranayama, do your Meditation, and also support yourself with a good, solid Philosophy. I don't know if it is Yoga, Samkhya, or something else. But you must have a guiding philosophy in life.

Any books you are currently reading?

No, nothing in particular. Now I tend to read Advaita books. There are some very good books written by Shankaracharya's students. I tend to sit and read them. Because you need to go over them. When you teach Yoga, you do not teach Vedanta, but you read them, go over them. There are very good works. There is one written by Adi Shankaracharya called Dakshinamurthy Ashtakam [Shiva Devotional Stotram (hymn)], there is a commentary, beautiful commentary written by one of his students. There is another text, called Panchadasi, 15 chapters written by one of the Shankaracharya students. They explain it in terms accessible by ordinary people, not just scholars. These are very interesting books that are available. I tend to read these books in my mother tongue, their translations and interpretations are more faithful. And they use terms close to original. Where are in English translations, it is very difficult to understand those English terms. When I find Tamil translation, that's my mother tongue, I tend to read that. So whenever I am not doing anything, I read a few shlokas every day, think about it. It keeps you going.

Do you have any advice for teachers who are only starting? Or do you wish, you had done something differently in your own teaching career?

I will say that Yoga is a very very rich subject, it is very rewarding. It helps you physically, psychologically, disciplines your mind. Only thing is, try to understand all these things, reflect on all the practices. Even if you do your asana practice, reflect upon that: how do you feel after this

particular asana, this particular vinyasa, kriya? How do you feel after Pranayama? And look for long-term effects. Over the period of time – maybe practice for a month or two, and see how you feel. I am sure that the whole system was designed in such a way that it was going to benefit the individual. It meant to benefit the individual. They have done a lot of research, a lot of practice on this. It is a result of accumulation of lots of individual practices, and practices of gurus, like my Guru, Krishnamacharya. Teachers must teach with certain amount of conviction. You practice, see how you feel, and start teaching – that should be helpful.

Try to maintain practice, try to enlarge your base, so you make it really useful for yourself first. Before you start teaching others, find usefulness to yourself. And then, share it with others.

Thank you very, very much for your time.

Thank you. I hope it will be useful.



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Website of S.Ramaswami vinyasakrama.com (<http://vinyasakrama.com>)

Yuri Sharonin (<http://vinyasakrama.com/Teachers>) is certified (Nº81) Vinyasa Krama teacher, located in Belmont, San Francisco Bay Area, CA, USA.

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