

THE BLOG

The Father of Modern Yoga

While Sri T. Krishnamacharya may not be a household name, we can thank him for the diversity of styles of yoga we now enjoy, ranging from the strenuous to the therapeutic.

By Larry Payne, Ph.D., Contributor

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Many people discover yoga because they are looking to alleviate pain or discomfort. My introduction to yoga was not atypical -- a search for relief from terrible back pain. Let's face it: The human body was not designed to sit in a chair or car seat for 10 hours per day. After 12 years as the West Coast

representative of *McCall's* magazine, I was stressed out, and most of tension in my life somehow made its way to my lower back.

During my very first yoga class, the throbbing pain that was in my back for over a year subsided for several hours, and I had an overall sense of calmness and well-being. I was hooked!

So equipped with press credentials from *McCall's*, I went on sabbatical, embarking on a global sojourn to learn from the masters. In India, I met with BKS Iyengar, Yogi Bhanjan, Satya Sai Baba, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (now known as Osho), Swami Vishnu Devananda, and TKV Desikachar, the son of the father of modern yoga: [Sri T. Krishnamacharya](#).



While Sri T. Krishnamacharya may not be a household name, we can thank him for the diversity of styles of yoga we now enjoy, ranging from the strenuous to the therapeutic. Most current practitioners can trace the roots of their asana practice back to this 5 foot, 2 inch Brahmin man who lived a life of 100 years and never stepped foot in the United States.

I first met Krishnamacharya in 1980. Unfazed by my press credentials and the prospect for international publicity, it took

three weeks before he agreed to meet with me. Despite his diminutive physical stature, he had an intimidating presence. It didn't help that rather than touch his feet, as protocol would have dictated, I instead shyly gestured namaste. On my third visit to India to study daily with his son Desikachar, I was honored with the request to produce the first tribute to Krishnamacharya in the U.S. I was then summoned by Sri Krishnamacharya for a blessing and a ceremony for the task that awaited me.



I was given access to rare and historical footage that I thought would be important to all American yogis who didn't have the opportunity to practice in India, so in 1987 I produced an event that took place in Los Angeles and brought together Krishnamacharya's students from all over. Indra Devi, his first female student in the mid-20th century, and who opened the first yoga studio in Hollywood and taught such icons as Marilyn Monroe and Greta Garbo, traveled from Argentina to share remembrances of her time with the yoga master. Desikachar shared family experiences that offered unique glimpses of a childhood in a world far removed from our lives

in America. The event was a wonderful homage to the man who had invented the modern approach to yoga.

My respect for Sri T. Krishnamacharya has only grown over time. Never static, his teachings continually evolved over the course of his long life and practice. He believed that yoga should be taught to the individual in a non-harming way and should be adapted to the individual, based on age, physical ability, profession, and mental state.



From this single teacher has arisen an array of approaches: K. Pattabhi Jois, and his Ashtanga yoga for the "young and restless"; the precise alignment of BKS Iyengar; TKV Desikar's Viniyoga, reflecting his father's contemporary teachings; and the user-friendly, therapeutic styles of Prime of Life Yoga and the [Yoga Therapy Rx Program](#). The legacy of the founder of modern legacy is thriving throughout yoga studios all over America and the rest of the world today.

I recently came across a tape of the event and reflected on the treasure it was. I have had it remastered as the DVD "A Tribute to Krishnamacharya" so to be able to share it with the next generation of American yogis who are as passionate about yoga as I am.



For more on yoga, click [here](#).

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