

Śrī TKV Desikachar 1938-2016 - In Memorium August 8th 2019

The teachings that TKV Desikachar received from T Krishnamacharya around Yoga practice and practice theory were far more extensive than is often presumed from the contemporary perception of Krishnamacharya's Yoga legacy. These perceptions were mostly formed from either, the more well publicised approach to Āsana by some of Krishnamacharya's early students, or the popularised generic view of Viniyoga as a stylistic application of Āsana, found primarily within the therapeutic adaptive Yoga field or commingled breath and movement group Yoga classes.

By way of contrast my own experiences studying with Desikachar, developed over some thirty ongoing visits to Madras over more than two decades to study privately with him, may offer a different insight into the practice possibilities that I became increasingly exposed to. However as with many, even these days, being introduced to the teachings of Krishnamacharya still meant that Āsana was the starting point for our exploration into what is Yoga. In other words the 'on the practice mat' aspects of Bāhya Aṅga Sādhana.

Thus in the 1970's, as a student in their thirties with only some five years exposure to Āsana practice, the starting point in my studentship with Desikachar began with a proposal for a personalised Sādhana focused on learning and developing a relationship with specific primary and secondary Āsana. Here, in the initial personalised practices, I explored Āsana from an Annamaya perspective to ascertain relative mobility within the body's joints, as well as any individual characteristics in terms of asymmetrical differences, or imbalances and potentials within the inherent qualities of strength and stamina.

This exploration into the Annamaya dimension of my being was complimented by an equally extensive initiative inquiry into the potential for a Prāṇamaya aspect within my practice. In other words an assessment into the starting point for my breathing, with its strengths and issues and developmental potential. Here this aspect was researched under the inquisitive eye and ear of Desikachar exploring how the individual characteristics and interactive relationship between the four quadrants of the breath expressed themselves when carefully integrated within a contrasting range of Āsana, within a variety of categories such as standing, lying, inverted, backbend, seated, etc.

Alongside this an increasing number and wider range of primary and secondary Āsana were introduced, according to the students potential, coupled with their developmental interest and available time and energy to devote to this element of practice.

It is at this point we could make an analogy of this experience to that of starting a family with Āsana being the first borne. However, in this family it's the first of a number of children yet to arrive. Also the experience gained from that first 'child' feeds into ones 'parenting' skills with regard to future arrivals. Along within this is the potential emerging of the issues we might need to contend skilfully with, such as the impact on our time, energy and the setting of proportional priorities between these additional commitments.

This is how it is with Āsana, in that after settling into a rhythm with this first family member we are exposed to further practice 'children' and dealing with their arrival in terms of adding and integrating them into our existing practice. Here Desikachar introduced and added to my practices the tools of Kriyā, Mudrā and Prāṇāyāma. So in a relatively short time there were four aspects to integrate.

From here, once my competence with the length and stamina with all the four components of my breath reached a certain level, the practice of Bandha was added to the existing practices of Kriyā and Āsana and especially Mudrā and Prāṇāyāma.

These five tools of Kriyā, Āsana, Bandha, Mudrā and Prāṇāyāma sort of completed the Haṭha aspect of my Sādhana. Now the issue was how to devote time to see that none were neglected, not an easy commitment with any increasing family. However, from the practice

viewpoint of this Saṃpradāya this was only a starting point to prepare the outer for the inner rigours yet to come.

This Bāhya Aṅga Sādhana with Haṭha Yoga prepared the ground for other practices drawn more from the fields of Rāja Yoga and Bhakti Yoga in terms of exploring Dhāraṇā as a preparation of the mind for Dhyānam, or the formalised practice of meditation.

This journey into Antar Aṅga Sādhana was initially developed by the refinement of Dhāraṇā through the formal embracing of the practice of Adhyayanam, or the practice of chanting. Though here the family analogy involved the arrival of twins in that there were two side by side dimensions to the practice of Adhyayanam. Because I was committed to exploring all aspects of chanting as embraced within this Saṃpradāya, my study and practice of chanting needed to integrate and develop two parallel threads.

One was the practice of Jñāna Adhyayanam or the chanting of the Yoga Sūtra as a tool for self-inquiry into the nature of, what is and what isn't, what we call mind. The other thread was the practice of Bhakti Adhyayanam, or the chanting of the Veda as a tool for devotional melding with that which is the source of sound. However, even though they may 'sound' somewhat the same and both come under the generic banner of chanting, they were in reality very different practices and were never actually mixed or taught to me together within the same lesson.

From an ongoing personal practice experiential perspective, I also found they required different contexts when it came to giving time to their individual development and refinement to reach a point where there was self-autonomy, in terms of competence and especially the ability to self-monitor and thus self-develop my practice.

As this relationship with the ever-increasing family progressed over the years, my lessons within the many return visits to study with Desikachar moved ever deeper from Bāhya Aṅga into Antar Aṅga. Here the next arrival in this process of interiorisation was the exploration, within the privacy of our one to one lessons, of a formal commitment and initiation into the seated practice of Dhāraṇā and its foundational role in facilitating Dhyānam or seated meditation. This involved the introduction, monitoring and refinement of a personalised practice emphasising cultivating Dhāraṇā through Mantra Japam solely within a Piṭham or seat and took place over several years, again to facilitate reaching a point of self-autonomy.

Thus what started as a single practice of Āsana grew over the decades into a complex family structure with many aspects and as the reader can appreciate, there are now many more possibilities than are usually apparent within the the popularised generic view of Krishnamacharya's teaching, primarily found within the therapeutic field, or within the group class Āsana based sticky mat environment that abounds today.

To summarise, my Yoga Sādhana Upāya included the Viniyoga or an individualised and personalised application of Kriyā, Āsana, Prāṇāyāma, Bandha, Mudrā, Jñāna Adhyayanam, Bhakti Adhyayanam, Dhāraṇā and Japam. Furthermore there is a relational link between them that manifests and unfolds according to the interest and potential of the student's Yoga journey. Alongside this is a developmental map that guides the student in the journey from movement to stillness or Bāhya Aṅga to Antar Aṅga, from outer to inner or Āsana to Dhyānam.

This is the strength, depth and potential of Krishnamacharya's teachings and Desikachar's skills in the transmission of practice Sādhana and why teaching lessons within a 121 personal context remained at the heart of Krishnamacharya's and Desikachar's priorities throughout their lives. This also still remains the vital element in fully appreciating what Desikachar intended when he introduced the term Viniyoga in 1983, in response to requests from his Western pupils, as a collective description of a process for a systematic development of the students personal experience of Yoga.

Meanwhile I salute my abiding memory of TKV Desikachar for all that I received from his transmission of the inimitable teachings of T Krishnamacharya. Śrī Gurubhyo Namaḥ