



## Reflections on TKV Desikachar's Teaching and Svatantra.....

As a student, my teacher worked at guiding me towards becoming increasingly independent in developing and refining more and more my personal practice skills so I became less and less dependent on him being the vehicle for if, when, where, what and how well I practice. I have always respected this aspect of his 121 teaching, in that, like a parent with a child, he progressively facilitated my learning. This enabled me to evolve an intelligently consistent, situation adaptive and yet long term developmental self-practice, initially through and then much more than, just Āsana.

*"TKV Desikachar did not teach different people different things.  
Nor did he just teach the same thing to different people.  
He taught different people the same thing in different ways.  
The same could be said of T Krishnamacharya's teaching.  
Hence the context of the phrase the Viniyoga of Yoga."*

Especially as, like any art that we wish to become accomplished in, this self-skill was cultivated primarily within my home environment with all its hues and moods that inevitably influence, or are driven by deeper motivations within our current intentions and situation realities.

*"Yoga Sādhana is about what grows out of  
practising alone amidst the inside at home, rather  
than practising with others amidst the outside in class."*

Thus he guided me into self-inspired and self-motivated practice without the need for neutral or even conducive surroundings to influence the mood, or please the eye, ear or nose. Of course, adding these factors may arise as a fruit in terms of creating a supportive environment, but the message here was that the 'temple' we need to enter ultimately sits within the heart, rather than within some external room or building.

Also from the very beginning of our work together, Desikachar diminished his role with regard to the teacher's physical presence, voice or image. Reflecting back, I now see that he took steps to ensure that, from the student's perspective, the presence of the teacher is ultimately a distraction to, rather than an enhancement of one's personal practice aura, or focus gatherer, or energy simulator, or endurance sustainer.

Decades later, I can really appreciate this strategy, especially given the modern predilection for not only live 'teachers' but also the 'presence' of the virtual 'teacher/companion', through the multiple online or on-site mediums that we are assailed with, such as Youtube, Zoom, Skype, Video Streaming, Mobile Apps, etc., all presenting themselves to either lead or lubricate, cajole or caress, stimulate or soothe the student.

Of course, these resources can be helpful as occasional support or for 'beginners' but as a first choice, in that without them we are unable to get onto the mat and even once on, unable to deeply get into the practice? There can also be a further consideration in that the use of

outside stimuli, however 'good' are ultimately sustaining a link to the external, rather than fully stepping across the threshold towards the intelligence inherent within one's own Nimitta or internal 'farmer'.

This journey towards Svatantra or independence around self-practice, was also ultimately self-empowering with regard to an increasing self-responsibility in setting the time of day or night I practised, or length of time I would be on the mat, or mat rather than cushion, or the tone, or intensity, or style, or proportion between Kriyā, Āsana, Mudrā, Bandha, Prāṇāyāma, Pratyāhāra, Adhyayanam or Dhyānam.

*"Yoga practice evolves from an external other cooked restaurant experience to an internal self cooked home experience via the stages of:*

*1. Dependence on an outside teacher and external ambient venue.*

*2. Interdependence where we add the beginnings of a home practice to our outside support.*

*3. Independence where we have refined the skill to rely on and be primarily nourished by our home practice.*

*This is Svatantra."*

This independence, also progressed through the fivefold field of the Pañca Maya, developing from the physical aspect and embracing the increasingly subtler aspects, as the practice evolved from just Kriyā and Āsana, before adding Mudrā and Prāṇāyāma, then towards Adhyayanam and Dhyānam.

Understanding more the relationship between the dimensions of practice tools also facilitated skilful space and time-management and offered opportunities to move beyond becoming 'stuck on the sticky mat' so to speak. In other words Āsana becoming synonymous with Yoga, or limiting my desires as fruits from practice to just fitness, stress-busting, or inducing feelings of happy hips, heart or head.

*"The heart of Yoga lies in cultivating a connection strategy rather than cultivating just a coping strategy."*

So as well as these short term finite goals, a comprehensive Yoga practice can also support a lifetime process, moving towards the deeper more complex issues of how the experience of Duḥkha or suffering impacts our psyche, and its resulting effect on our individualised perspective in terms of self-identity, desire, aversion or fear.

From offering stability within this initial awareness of its impact, Yoga practice can become a tool within the journey towards understanding the nature and cause of Duḥkha, in the spirit of the Catur Vyūham, or four noble truths of Patañjali, outlined so eloquently from the Yoga Sūtra through its companion commentary.

*"Duḥkha is the starting point for the Yoga journey of four junctures from: the symptom, as in Duḥkha or suffering, to the cause, as in Avidyā or illusion, to the goal, as in Kaivalya or independence; via the tools, as in Aṣṭāṅga or 8 limbed path, for the means, as in Viveka or discernment. This ancient fourfold process is at the heart of the teachings in Yoga, Āyurveda & Buddhism."*

Looking back as I write these words, I find myself still in awe at being led so intelligently through this process of what a personal Yoga practice means, from the perspective of Desikachar and Krishnamacharya.