

# T. KRISHNAMACHARYA ANSWERS HIS STUDENTS

The manuscripts of T. Krishnamacharya's essays and teachings, covering a span of over 50 years (1930's to 1980's), have been placed at the disposal of KYM Darśanam by his son and student, T.K.V. Desikachar. The translation and compiling of these works is a major task which has been undertaken by Mala Srivatsan. A selection of the questions asked over the years by his students, together with the *ācārya*'s answers forms the first of these manuscripts to appear in our journal.

Mala Srivatsan had studied under the *ācārya* during the last eight years of his life and was guided by him in all matters.

**What does Yoga mean?**

Yoga is,

—the *samyoga* of the *jīvātma* and the *paramātma*

—the *samyoga* of the *prāṇa* and *apāna*

—the *samyoga* of the *prāṇa* from the *sūrya* and *candra nādi*-s in the *suṣumna nādi*

—the *samyoga* of the *jīvātma* and *manas* (mind).

Though many different definitions of yoga have been given, there is no yoga without a disciplined mind.

Therefore, the most comprehensive definition of yoga is - *citta vṛtti nirodah*. This *bhāvana* (visualisation) of Patañjali's is the most important of all definitions of yoga.

**How necessary is yoga in these modern times?**

For the strengthening of the *anga*-s, *yogāsana*-s practiced with long inhalation and exhalation is important.

To reduce the disturbances of the mind, to gain mental strength and to increase longevity, *prāṇāyāma* is necessary.

To derive *siddhi* through *samyama* (*savikalpa samādhi*), *dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna* and *samādhi* have to be practised.

To attain *mukti* (salvation), *nirvikalpa samādhi* should be practised.

These practices should be according to one's capacity.

**Who is competent to be a teacher and what is the teacher's responsibility?**

One who has studied the *śāstra*-s, who recites the Veda-s and follows his *svadharma* is competent to be a teacher.

The responsibility of the teacher is to consider the welfare of the student.

**To what extent can *yama* and *niyama* be practised nowadays?**

It is not possible to practise all the requirements of *yama* and *niyama* nowadays. However it is still possible to practise the disciplines of *brahmacharya* and *pātivratam* contained in *yama* and the disciplines of *śauca*, *svādhyāya* and *iśvarapraṇidhāna* contained in *niyama*. But even these are not possible without a good relationship between the teacher and the student.

**Why do different teachers teach in different ways and is there any method of standardisation?**

Different teaching methods arise when the

*pātivratam*: being  
faithful to one's husband

teacher has not gone to the right *ācārya* or if the teachers do not belong to the same *guru parampara*. The incompetence and the desire of the *pradhāna śiṣya* (principal student) could also be a reason. Because of this there is a fall in the standards of teaching and as a result there is suffering in the world. There is no solution to this problem.

#### **Should we change the *yoga krama* to the needs of today's world?**

The essential features should not change or else it will result in disease and reduce longevity.

#### **Is it possible to remove the impurities of the body and revive its strength and vitality through yoga?**

With the right *āhāram* (food), with the strength of *ga abhyāsa*, the strength of *brahmacarya*, the strength of *dhyāna* and by being under the direct care of one-teacher for many years, this is possible.

#### **What activities can all the *śiṣya*-s do together?**

The students can, if they have the quality of *śāntam* (tranquility) and are without *ahankāram* (arrogance), do — *śāstra adhyayanam*, they can re-examine their experience and rectify their mistakes, they can do *grantha racana* (writing of books) in conformity with their tradition.

These are the activities they can do together. This will be in addition to their own *abhyāsam*.

#### **Can yoga be learnt through books?**

There are some persons who with very little study and with no experience, write books on yoga. People learn yoga through these books and their photographs and these books become the standard guides. This will harm yoga. Those who have received the authentic teaching are also harming yoga by not showing these other teachers the right direction.

#### **How long should one stay in *śīrṣāsana* and *sarvāṅgāsana*?**

The time spent in each *āsana* should be the same. The number of breaths taken in *śīrṣāsana* should be equal to the number of breaths taken in *sarvāṅgāsana*. The length of each breath should also be equal. These postures are like the eyes

of yoga. They strengthen the senses and the respiratory organs. A person with a heart problem should approach the practice of these *āsana*-s with utmost care. Only when a student is capable of doing *sarvāṅgāsana* should the teacher think of teaching him *śīrṣāsana*. Persons with asthma will have problems in practising these postures. In the beginning these persons should stay for two to three breaths only.

#### **What is meant by *jitāsana*?**

*Jitāsana* (*āsana jayam*) is the capacity of a person to stay in an *āsana* for a length of time, without experiencing pain. In ancient times, the sages were able to stay in an *āsana* for more than three hours during their *prāṇāyāma* and *dhyāna* practice.

#### **What is meant by *jitaśvāsam*?**

*Jitaśvāsam* is the capacity of a person to do any length of *bāhya kumbhakam* (hold after exhale) and *antaḥ kumbhakam* (hold after inhale), without getting tired. Such a person is called a *jitaśvāsi*.

#### **What must form an essential part of a person's daily practice?**

A minimum of ten minutes in *antaḥ-trātakam*, *śaṅmukīmudrā* or *mahāmudrā* is essential.

*antaḥ-trātakam*: gazing with the eyes closed

#### **For how long did the sages practise yoga?**

Nine hours a day. This included the performance of *sandhyāvandhanam* thrice a day.

#### **What should be the duration of *praṇava*, in recitation?**

The time for *praṇava* should be six seconds when doing *prāṇāyāma*.

#### **How long should a person stay in an *āsana* everyday?**

A person must stay in any one *āsana* for at least fifteen minutes.

#### **What is the first step in *dhyāna* for a beginner?**

For a beginner it is desirable to use a very beautiful *mūrti* (idol).

**What should be done when limited time is available for practice?**

When time is limited, one can reduce the time taken to practise *śīrṣāsana* and *sarvāṅgāsana*.

**What should be the ratio of practice between āsana, prāṇāyāma and dhyāna?**

The time spent in *prāṇāyāma* should, at the very least, be equal to the time spent in *āsana*-s. The time spent in *dhyāna* should be equal to the time spent in *prāṇāyāma*. Where the time spent in all three is equal, the practice is called *jadayogam* (not enough).

**When can one see the results of practise?**

After three months of continuous practise.

**How should very fat persons and pregnant women be taught?**

They should not be allowed to practise on their own without a teacher. When fat people practise on their own, they may experience chest pain, vomiting or giddiness. When pregnant women practise without guidance, due to the changes in the breathing pattern, there could be a displacement of the womb.

**Is there a difference in the practice of men and women?**

Except during their menstrual cycles, the practice for unmarried women is the same as that for men.

**What about the practice for women after child birth?**

They can begin practice three days after child birth, if they do not have any illness. They should begin with *anuloma ujjāyī prāṇāyāma*, doing 24 breaths, three times a day, for one week. *Kumbhakam* should not be done. They can then proceed to lie on their back, legs bent, desk pose and move their arms with breathing. Still later they can raise their legs to touch the toes. After 15 days they can do *dandāsana*. After a month they can do *parvatāsana* and *nādiśodhana prāṇāyāma*. After two months they can do *sarvāṅgāsana*. However, during pregnancy they should not do *śīrṣāsana* and *sarvāṅgāsana* after the fifth month. They should not do *paścimatānāsana* and similar postures. They may do *mahāmudrā*.

**What is your advice to students?**

Śrī (let good happen to all).



T. Krishnamacharya with Menaka and T.K.V. Desikachar