



## Summary of Quotes from the Yoga of T Krishnamacharya

**"These are, in brief, some things about Krishnamacharya and his Yoga.  
You must judge for yourself where he actually stands."**

"Let us look at his usual day. Whether you believe it or not, this old man gets up at one o'clock in the morning. Anybody is welcome to wait on the verandah and see that he gets up at one o'clock in the morning. And one o'clock in the morning is something for us, I mean it is like a terror to get up at one o'clock, and he is 93. He prepares his own tea and then he practices.

I did not believe that, until I saw, because he is staying with me, that he practices Yoga Āsana and Prāṇāyāma every day. In fact more than once every day, including headstand and Padmāsana, I am mentioning Padmāsana you see, because we are all sitting on chairs.

Headstand, Padmāsana, everything he does, and at 5 o'clock the bell rings and we know that he has started his Pūja. And the bell is not one of those small bells like they have on dining room tables. I am sure that bell must weigh 1½-2 kilos, because it is made of bronze. It must meet certain specifications, and the bell must produce the tone of OM, so it is quite heavy.

I often wonder whether I could ever do this for five minutes, like he does. He goes on waking God-come on, get up, get up, get up- also with some recitation, and all the family at that time curses him because he is waking all of us. At 6.30, when he has done all the chantings, it is very interesting to watch him doing these, he makes his own breakfast.

Then I go to see him at 7 o'clock in the morning and we chant for one hour. And then sometimes he has somebody at eight o'clock for chanting; somebody else at nine. So he will be teaching this Vedic chanting for 3 hours, after one hour of Pūja. You must try to chant for fifteen minutes, it is so tiring, but he manages. He has a great will."

"He has developed so much in his teaching, made so many changes, that I don't think anybody can identify 'Krishnamacharya's style'.

One person will say one thing, and a few minutes later somebody else will say, no, no, this is what he taught me.

So fortunately it solved the problem of the 'Krishnamacharya style', unless you are unwilling to see, of course."

"There is another practical thing, it is like what we call Vinyāsa.

At different times, he (Krishnamacharya) has said that any teaching must have the following conditions:

First, from where is the student coming? What is called Deśa. Is he from America, or is he from North India? Teaching must consider whether the person is from one country or another.

Then Deha; Deha means what to teach a fat man; what to teach a lean person; what to teach an old person; what to teach a young person. All those things must be respected, whether teaching music or astrology or vedic chanting or anything.

Kāla, year, the way to teach and what to teach depends on the time of year. Spring teaching is different; winter teaching is different; the time of teaching and what is to be taught also is different.

Vṛtti, what I would teach a runner; what I would teach a philosopher; these must be different. Vṛtti-bheda, depending on the avocation of the person, the teaching of anything must vary.

And then Mārga, somebody is interested in devotion, somebody else is interested in fitness; somebody else wants to chant because he wants to sleep; somebody else wants to chant because he wants to pray. Depending on the mind of the student, the practice must be adapted.

Śakti, the capacity of the person; how much endurance he has; how much memory he has; how much time he has to study or to practice.

All these things must be examined."

"The person who taught me how to vary postures, to bend the legs, to turn the neck, all the simple and complicated variations, as necessary, is Krishnamacharya. It is important to vary each posture according to the individuals requirements.

Further, he also introduced the use of other aids or supports, so that the person gets the benefit of a posture through other means when he is not able to do the posture itself. This can involve sitting on a chair, using a roll, using supports, etc., the use of other means to help a person achieve certain results."

"Most importantly, he also has gone to the final limits of the use of the breathing in postures. He found, and he insists, that breathing is an essential tool in the practice of Āsana.

Varying the way to breathe, varying the length of the breath, using different combinations of postures and breath, he has proven that it is possible to modify postures to meet the requirements of individuals.

For him, breathing is like the steering wheel of a car."

"Another important thing that he has understood is that that these Āsana should not be taken one by one, they have to be taken as a group and as a composition.

This means you don't do headstand on Monday, shoulder stand on Tuesday, you do your group of Āsana linked like words in a sentence."

"He has also given to us the concept of Pratikriyāsana, the idea of compensation and counterpose.

Since all actions have some reactions, we have to compensate for the reactions."

"Finally he conceived the idea of what is called Vinyāsa. In fact, in the beginning of his teaching, around 1932, he evolved a list of postures leading towards a particular posture, and coming away from it.

This is different Āsana linked to one another in a scheme as though one posture leads to the following one. And this scheme was very important, especially for children, who find it very interesting.

He continues to have the same faith in this, although you cannot always follow these schemes for adults or people who are sick.

Still the idea of Vinyāsa, begin from where you are, go to a point, and come back to where you have to be, remains valid."

"He also presented the idea that Āsana is Svādhyāya, making you understand something about yourself."

"Because of the different uses of breathing, he strongly believes that the beginning of Prāṇāyāma is in Āsana.

Āsana, and Āsana alone, with proper breathing techniques, leads you to the idea of Prāṇāyāma."

"And, in the Prāṇāyāma also, the different types, like Vaikharī, the different Vṛtti, the different Krama, he put them all into practice.

One of the greatest contributions, I would say, of Krishnamacharya to Prāṇāyāma, is the use of Bāhya Kumbhaka, and the importance of Recaka, or exhalation."

"Because of his knowledge of Āyurveda, he conceived Prāṇāyāma also as Bṛmhaṇa Kriyā or Laṅghana Kriyā."

"One of the most complicated aspects of Yoga practice is the Bandha. He has been able to link correctly various ideas on the Bandha that appear in different texts, and is able to say that certain Bandha can only be done in certain parts of the Prāṇāyāma.

I may also say, that nobody is clearer about the Mūla Bandha than Krishnamacharya."

"Further, he also added long ago, the idea of Bhāvana in the practice of Prāṇāyāma. Long, long ago, he said, the breathing, inhalation, exhalation and retentions have some sort of relationship with the highest force, Lord Nārāyaṇa.

Inhalation is like an inspiration from God himself. Retention is some sort of meditation, because you are with Him. Exhalation is some sort of movement towards God, and retention after exhale is like a surrender to God."

"Another thing that he made very simple, and practical, is the use of Mahā Mudrā. This is a very well known posture now, but when you start looking at the texts, nothing is clear there.

He has incorporated the Āsana part, the breathing part, and the Mudrā part, and, he feels, Mahā Mudrā, if practiced every day, prevents ill health."

"The practice of Yoga is linked to the Nāḍī, or pulse, so he always thinks that the pulse rate tells whether you have done a good practice or a bad practice.

He suggests that our life may be measured by the number of beats to the heart, and if somebody wants to live long and well, he has to reduce the rate of the heart beat.

This is, of course, a little different from what the aerobic people say, who think you should boost your heart rate to 130/140."

"Another contribution, I feel, is how he utilises the Yoga Sūtra in the practice. I remember in the first Zinal, when I used the word Yoga Sūtra, people thought I was talking about Greek civilisation or something.

My own reading of the Yoga Sūtra, without him, would have made me think it just another of those useless books on India. He linked each of the Sūtra to the practice."

"Now let us go to some of his views on matters of interest. He believes that the only Yoga text that has any clear presentation of Yoga is the Yoga Sūtra.

But, he says, Rāja Yoga is just words without Sādhana, just like I read the other day, that philosophy itself is more interesting than any result from it. However, with Sādhana, Rāja Yoga is the same as Bhakti Yoga."

"Regarding Yama and Niyama, these days, he believes, they have no validity except for two of them.

First, what is called Satya Niyama, or what to speak, what not to speak, to whom to speak, how to write, what not to write. These are Satya Niyama.

Another Niyama that should be followed is Āhāra Niyama. That is, how much to eat and what to eat, according to age, profession, etc. You see, the ancient people believed that a young boy could eat as much as he liked. But a Saṁnyāsi should only eat eight handfuls of rice, no more, per day."

"He has very clear ideas on the Ṣaṭ Kriyā and the Mudrā. He believes that if a person does Āsana properly, with breathing, and has certain restraints regarding food, there is no need for these Kriyā."

"In addition, the use of Kriyā, without a knowledge of the individual's Doṣa is certainly going to do more harm than good. Doṣa, briefly, means the constitution of the individual; some are fat, some tend to get a lot of colds, some have acid problems, some are nervous.

So different beings show different predominances in the Doṣa, and Kriyā must be considered in relation to these varying constitutions."

"Then he has certain ideas also about Kuṇḍalinī. The force is Prāṇa, the force called Śakti or Kuṇḍalinī is indeed Prāṇa.

The only means that can have any effect is the use of Prāṇāyāma, with emphasis on exhalation and the Bandha, aided by devotional chantings. And the evolution of Kuṇḍalinī is very much linked to the person's state of mind and Vairāgya."

"Then, he has also some views on Dhyāna. Since Dhyāna is a characteristic of mind, and since the mind is limited to form, Deśa, or the object of meditation, must be Saguṇa and not Nirguṇa.

Ordinary people need certain forms, certain visualisations, for Dhyāna, so any Dhyāna which is Nirguṇa is only Vikalpa."

"He insists that it is very important for a human being to go through family life. It is only through a deep understanding of family life that one can go beyond it.

He, himself, twice rejected the position of an important Ācārya because, he said, he would like to remain with his family."

"Thanks to him, it is possible to say that there are certain distinctions between Yoga and Hinduism."

"There are also fundamental differences between Yoga and Vedānta. And, if at all we can link them, it is as follows: Yoga is a means towards Vedānta for those who are interested.

Vedānta involves a lot of enquiry and reflection, and also demands the development of Bhakti, and, for both the mind and for the individual, Yoga is the means towards Bhakti.

Also, Vedānta is Jñāna Mārga, and a state of mind that is necessary for Jñāna can only come through the practice of Aṣṭāṅga."

"These are, in brief, some things about Krishnamacharya and his Yoga. You must judge for yourself where he actually stands."

- TKV Desikachar from lectures on 'The Yoga of T Krishnamacharya', given at Zinal, Switzerland 1981.