

# INTRODUCTION

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Yoga is both a systematized body of knowledge and a practice. There are many reasons why a person might choose to practice yoga; in broad terms, the purpose of yoga is to reduce disturbance and return an individual to his or her inherent peace and power. To be successful in this endeavor, yoga must be adapted and practiced according to the needs, capacities, and aspirations of each student. Yoga is not a standardized practice. The emphasis on personal shaping of the yoga practice is a hallmark of Professor Krishnamacharya's yoga guidance. *The Heart of Yoga* summarizes Krishnamacharya's principles of yoga understanding and explains the method of adapting a practice to individual needs.

Desikachar's depth of knowledge, which he claims to be only a fraction of his father's understanding, informs his unique ability to converse about yoga. His teachings and his sensitivity to an individual's needs are always communicated in the context of sincere friendship and humor. Vanda Scaravelli wrote: "Desikachar is a serious, profound and special yoga teacher as well as an agreeable person to be with, one can laugh and have fun with him."<sup>1</sup> This is also my experience and it is my hope that these qualities of Desikachar's will come through in this book.

Desikachar is a beautiful mix of the traditional and the contemporary man. He is absolutely devoted to his father, Krishnamacharya, who profoundly represents that which is ancient, deep, and true of India. Yet Desikachar received a Western-style education, earning a degree in engineering, and has been inspired by his radical contemporaries J. Krishnamurthi and U. G. Krishnamurthi, his friends of many years. Desikachar's background enables him to communicate the ancient understanding of yoga in a context that the Western mind can easily comprehend.

Like his father, Desikachar is a family man living in Madras. He spends most of his time in India, occasionally traveling to Western countries as a guest of his students. Many have had the good fortune of studying yoga privately with



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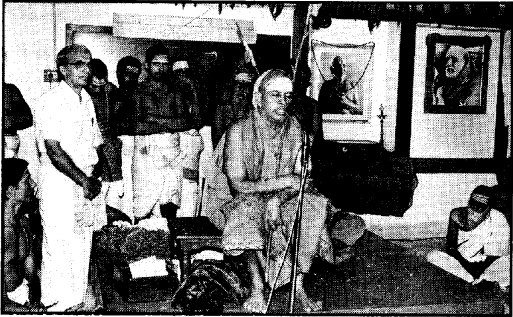
*U. G. Krishnamurthi (right) with Desikachar and friends in the Sannadhi, "the Presence," a small temple in Desikachar's residence where Krishnamacharya is remembered.*

<sup>1</sup> Vanda Scaravelli, *Awakening the Spine*. London: HarperCollins, 1991.

Desikachar, which is the traditional way. His manner of teaching is utterly personal and caring, defining a yoga practice that takes into account each person's requirements. There is always good humor and a spirited communication of well-being. Over the years Desikachar's consistent, happy, and energetic disposition has led me to wonder if he may be a liberated man, that is, if he might have attained the goal of yoga. However, in my understanding it is a question of no relevance to such a person, and Desikachar never comments on it.

The one prevailing theme in Desikachar's teaching is that anyone who wants to can practice an authentic yoga, a yoga that is uniquely suited to his or her needs and interests, and experience its many benefits. Krishnamacharya claimed that anyone who can breathe and use his or her fingers can practice yoga. Taking into account the health, age, and cultural background of each person, there is always an appropriate practice that can be developed so that real yoga can occur. Desikachar is able to communicate with people from vastly different backgrounds and with different perspectives on spiritual life and make yoga useful for them. Students from the East and the West have expressed their appreciation of Krishnamacharya and his yoga.

Some of Desikachar's students have been well-known teachers in their own fields, such as J. Krishnamurthi and Shankaracharya Jayendra Saraswathi Swami. Such teachers, who have influenced millions of people, have valued yoga highly as being helpful to body and mind. There could not be greater extremes between the teaching points of view of the iconoclast J. Krishnamurthi and the orthodox Shankaracharya, teacher to millions in the Hindu world, yet Desikachar has been at ease teaching both. This underscores the unique nature of Krishnamacharya's yoga—there is something in it for everyone. This is the application of yoga in the broadest sense.



*Desikachar with His Holiness Shankaracharya Jayendra Saraswathi Swami and his attendants on their visit to the Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram, 1993.*

Krishnamacharya studied for decades, first with his family and then more formally at universities. Finally he found his own teacher, Śrī Ramamohan Brahmachari, with whom he lived and studied in the Tibetan Himalayas for eight years. Krishnamacharya synthesized a vast amount of religious and yoga understanding. Desikachar, in turn, studied daily with his father from 1960 until 1989, when Krishnamacharya passed away at the age of 101 years. Together they summarized and clarified the ancient understanding and practice of yoga so that all people of all ages, regardless of their cultural or religious background, can learn and benefit from yoga teachings.

Krishnamacharya and Desikachar point out that yoga understanding developed in an ancient culture in which the notion of religion did not imply one social group against others, as it does today, causing much confusion among spiritual aspirants. Dharma or religion simply meant a virtuous way of life, and yoga was developed as a means of acknowledging or returning to the source of life. Because Krishnamacharya provided a context within which yoga can be practiced in conjunction with religious teachings, students have been able to

deepen their understanding and appreciation of their chosen tradition. I have seen the lives of people who were already involved in a religious practice become much fuller and happier having taken on the practice of yoga. The personal application of an appropriate yoga results in changes that are consistent with the purposes of all religious traditions, including Christianity. It offers a practical means by which other teachings may be quickened and realized.

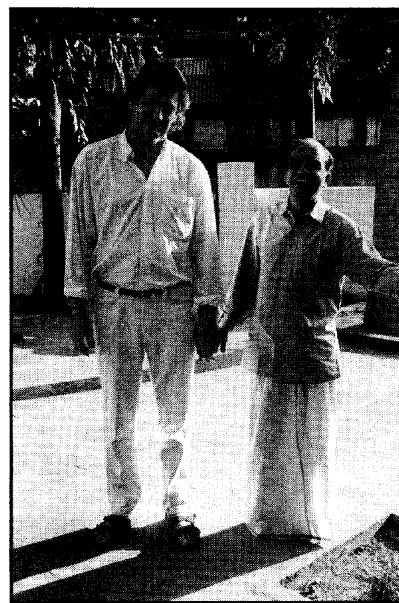
Of course, to practice yoga without reference to religious ideas is also valid. The precise summary of yoga understanding provided by Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra* does not require a belief in religious concepts such as God, nor does it deny such thinking. Specifically, the Patañjali *Yoga Sūtra* concerns the attainment of a stable mind and healthy body so that personal goals may be achieved. Such attainment is quite independent of cultural background and religious inclination.

Krishnamacharya considered Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra*, the reference text that underpins yoga, to be the most outstanding reference text for the guidance of yoga practice. The *Yoga Sūtra*, with Desikachar's commentary, is included as part 3 of this book. References are made to relevant sūtras throughout parts 1 and 2. Desikachar studied the *Yoga Sūtra* many times with his father, so we can take his commentary as an accurate representation of Krishnamacharya's understanding of Patañjali.

Desikachar emphasizes that the teacher/student relationship is of great importance in the study of yoga. This relationship is one of friendship and mutual trust. By the mere act of coming to a teacher, the student has already placed trust in the teacher that there is something to be gained. It is the teacher's responsibility not to exploit that trust; the teacher is entrusted to teach only according to the student's needs for personal freedom and well-being. The teachings should always be relevant to the student and allow for his or her growth and changing requirements. The teacher should have no psychological investment in being a teacher, and the teaching context should be free of attachment and steeped in a sense of natural friendship.

The problem with institutionalized yoga or textbook instruction is that the reality of a person's life situation is not taken into account. Without discrediting organizations that are obviously helpful to many aspiring yoga students, standardized or forced practices may not help in the study of yoga, and may in fact cause disturbance. The key to right teaching is in the adaptation of yoga to the individual, not the individual to yoga. Often organizations emphasize some aspects of yoga such as meditation or postures or high philosophical understanding without a realistic practice. Krishnamacharya taught that the whole spectrum of yoga practice must be carefully adapted to the individual's situation. Nothing can be forced.

As my capacity to practice and understand yoga developed over the years, Desikachar introduced new concepts and taught familiar things in different ways. He taught only what was relevant to me. Each person's situation




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*Desikachar with Mark Whitwell.*

determines the practices that are offered in the context of a supportive teacher/student friendship. In this way a student is led to an understanding of yoga that cannot be gotten directly from a teacher or a book, but is instead discovered by the student as his or her own realization. We are creatures of the universe, and the nature of the universe can be discovered in our own being as our inherent condition. A teacher cannot tell us about this so much as show us the path to our own understandings by way of this special guidance.

Feelings of gratitude and love may naturally develop as yoga realization progressively or suddenly unfolds. In yoga this is called *bhakti* or devotion, the natural feeling of gratitude to the teacher. Desikachar reports that he learned the nature of the teacher/student relationship when he taught great people. J. Krishnamurthi, for example, always demonstrated to Desikachar respect and gratitude for what he received, even though he too was a teacher.

Krishnamacharya taught that the eight limbs or aspects of yoga are not attained in linear progression; rather, the eight limbs are met simultaneously. Yoga distinguishes *sadhana*, “that which we can practice,” and *siddhi*, “that which is given.” There are aspects of yoga that we can intentionally practice and others that occur naturally as a result of doing this practice. The practices are physical postures and breathing exercises; all other aspects of yoga occur as a result of these practices. People who practice postures and breathing exercises report that the mind becomes more clear and less random in thought, and energy levels increase. There is a corresponding feeling of continuity between sense of self, environment, and others that some describe as a feeling of oneness.

By means of linking breath to the body in moving and stationary postures, the mind is connected with the body. We are brought into existence by the power of the universe. This power sustains the body and all its functions, including thinking and sense perception. When we attend to the process of linking breath with the whole body, the mind and the senses merge with the power of the universe. We might call this power *consciousness* and its active principle *energy*, or in yoga terms *puruṣa* and *prāṇa*. Through yoga, mind and senses become the communication mechanism of consciousness and energy rather than having apparently random and sometimes disturbing lives of their own.

When mind and senses are linked to consciousness, the objects of their perception are also joined with consciousness. At times there is sudden insight and brightness of perception, as clarity progressively develops and connectedness is recognized. Consciousness is felt to be the source of everything, and situations and objects are perceived from a radically new point of view. There is a sense of free participation in relationships and circumstances. With a clear mind we see things as they are, unclouded by assumptions or misapprehensions.

The habits of mind are strong, however. Yoga teaches that our obstructions need to be acknowledged and taken into account. A good yoga teacher helps the student develop a program that, practiced regularly, allows this joining of mind and senses to their source, to that which is most fundamental to existence.

Posture, breathing, meditation, and all the tools of yoga may be used, including elements of a person's familiar cultural or religious understanding. Whatever assists the student's development can be artfully adapted and modified as changes occur.

It fascinates me that the change in people who practice yoga is not the result of philosophical consideration or the study of spiritual ideas. Merely by following the careful instruction of connecting breath to the body in appropriate ways, as Krishnamacharya taught, and practicing on a daily basis, something shifts: insights come; the ability to focus on tasks and achieve goals develops; new ways of handling difficult emotions and situations are recognized; feelings of stillness, peace, certainty, happiness, love, or connectedness spontaneously occur; there is often a general improvement in life circumstances. The social and personal recommendations of *yama* and *niyama* seem to be more easily adopted as a result of yoga practice, when previously they were ideals that the student struggled with. Sometimes particular creative or relationship skills spontaneously arise to enrich a person's life.

These changes come not through arduous sessions or study of spiritual ideas but through a practice that may initially be twenty to thirty minutes long, placed appropriately in a person's daily routine. All eight limbs of yoga develop concurrently as a result of doing an appropriate practice of posture and breathing under the guidance of a knowledgeable teacher.

Krishnamacharya understood the yoga process and the art of adapting a practice to each person's needs. He taught that by beginning at the beginning, by developing awareness in the whole body and its instruments of perception—the mind and senses—yoga provides the means by which ordinary men and women can realize their potential. Through practice with body and breath, the student develops the ability to merge with the object of perception, to be with perceptions rather than against them and merely reacting to one's experience. Then an awareness of the profound context in which everything is happening may spontaneously develop. Hence, Desikachar instructs, "Yoga is relationship and relationship is peace." Krishnamacharya was certain that a yoga practice, rightly adapted to the individual, enabled one to discover the inherent connection to spirit, the source of body and mind. He taught that spirit, the context of life, is realized via the body, breath, and perception, in that order.

There is here an implied criticism of spiritual practices that attempt to bypass the body, breath, and ordinary experiences of life. Indeed, religious idealism that focuses on philosophical inspiration or an alternative reality to our present state can cause a conflict in the devotee by virtue of the stark difference between the proposed ideal and the actual experiences of life. In some cases the ideal itself can become an obstacle to clear perception. One must find a practical means of starting with present reality in order to feel the context, to recognize what is already true of body, breath, and perceptions. This inquiry requires no philosophy or speculation. For this reason Desikachar will often say, "In your life please emphasize the means, not the goal."

Krishnamacharya taught that we cannot practice meditation; all we can do is make the conditions right in body and mind so that meditation—the merging with our natural state—may spontaneously occur and understanding come. In other words, we should not willfully struggle to reach a goal or obtain a preconceived ideal. He also taught that the way to realize the great understanding of *advaita* (nondualism) is through yoga practice. Mere philosophizing or contemplation Krishnamacharya regarded as futile because it turns a great understanding into an idea, a separate object. His many years of assiduous study of the great philosophical systems of India convinced Krishnamacharya that yoga was required for a person to actualize the ideas that the great teachings proposed. His commitment to yoga developed from a clear understanding of India's entire religious and philosophical tradition. Advaita Vedānta is the dominant religious and philosophical influence of Krishnamacharya's society. He was fond of entering into debate with the Advaitins who did not practice yoga, insisting that their dualistic habits of mind could not be changed without an artful yoga. It is yoga that joins the two to become one, leading the perceiver to merge with the perceived.

Much of Krishnamacharya's teaching was counter to the prevailing views of Indian society. His stance that women had the right to practice yoga and participate fully in religious and social life was very controversial in the conventional society of his time. He defended his position by referring to Sanskrit texts indicating that women were educated and practiced yoga in ancient times. He held the view that women, as the nurturers of the community, had a special requirement and right to practice yoga, and he emphasized the benefits of yoga for pregnancy. He also predicted that women would have the greater part in spreading yoga throughout the world. This prediction is perhaps already proving to be true.

Krishnamacharya's explanation of *kuṇḍalinī* was also at odds with popular views. He taught that there were not two energies in the body, those being *prāṇa* and *kuṇḍalinī*, but that there was only one. Again he referred to Sanskrit texts to explain that, accurately translated, *kuṇḍalinī* means "obstruction." Yoga practice helps to remove obstruction so that *prāṇa* can move in all areas of the body, particularly through the central channel, or *nāḍī*, known as *suṣumṇā*.

Further, he explained that the goal of yoga was *vairāgya*, meaning "peace" in terms of detachment or freedom in the midst of all experience. As evidenced by the life of Professor Krishnamacharya, this is not a passionless state of detachment. On the contrary, all experience is integrated and forms a coherent whole in the context of this freedom. One acts with full energy and clear intention in the midst of life experiences. Krishnamacharya argued that without the elimination of attachments, which are the fundamental cause of unhappiness or obstruction, concepts such as *kuṇḍalinī* or tantra are not relevant to yoga. It is only when obstruction is removed that energy moves in the body and mind becomes connected to consciousness. Then the phenom-

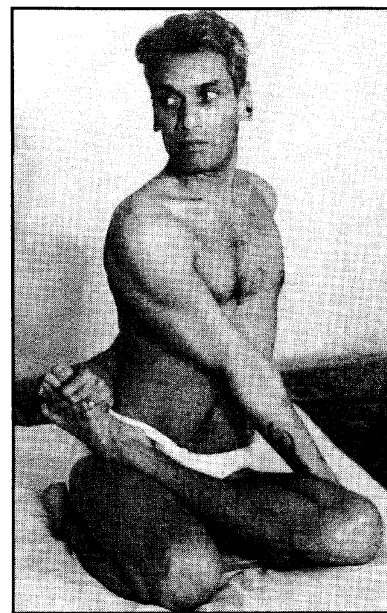
enon described in the traditions of kuṇḍalinī and tantra may occur but are of no consequence. In other words, the goal of yoga is peace, not power. The practices that attempt to develop power without peace can be destructive. Hence there are constant warnings that one should not practice yoga techniques without the continual guidance of a competent teacher, even in the final stages of spiritual maturity. Peace cannot be attained through power, yet power is a result of peace. In peace—in recognizing one's inherent connection to the universe and all its possibilities—lies true power.

Krishnamacharya recommended that the best way to remove obstruction is through the careful consideration of one's circumstances and responses to life with a trusted teacher. Yoga practice may help to give clarity as to what needs to be changed, but at a certain point no amount of yoga or spiritual transmission can substitute for taking action to eliminate attachments to unhappy circumstances or habits of response that are creating obstructions in the body and mind. Yoga and the teaching relationship is a catalyst or agent of change, allowing change to occur naturally when the person is ready. Krishnamacharya made clear that detachment or freedom could not develop without trust in oneself, in one's teacher, and in yoga practice. He often said "You cannot have vairāgya without bhakti."

Although Krishnamacharya was deeply respectful of the beliefs and devotional feelings of others, he did not compromise his commitment to understanding the process of human development and communicating his perception of truth. He maintained that everything he communicated was taught to him by his guru and authenticated by ancient yoga texts; his fluency in Sanskrit enabled him to translate traditional texts accurately and interpret their meaning. In accordance with the tradition of yoga, he acknowledged that understanding is passed from teacher to teacher. Yoga knowledge is not attributable to any individual exclusively, but is the communication of a Greater Power or Absolute Source.

Krishnamacharya gave a vast amount of information to many people according to their individual needs. From this and other teaching sources standardized approaches to yoga have been derived that seem to be quite different from each other, confusing students and teachers alike. In my view, it is not useful to think of different styles of yoga: this is simply yoga, which comes from a vast and ancient source. The only authentic yoga is the one that works for each person according to circumstances and needs, and there are many possibilities.

Śrī Krishnamacharya is responsible for much of the yoga being taught in the world today. As early as the 1930s young men such as B. K. S. Iyengar (his brother-in-law) and Pattabhi Jois, who would go on to become famous teachers and popularize yoga throughout the world, studied with him. Krishnamacharya's first Western student, Indra Devi, has devoted her life to presenting yoga to the West, carrying the torch for her teacher with great love. All the while, Desikachar lived and studied with Krishnamacharya, and in the course of those



*Krishnamacharya's student, the mahārājah of Kolhapur, demonstrating bharadvājāsana, 1940.*



*Desikachar, Krishnamacharya, and Indra Devi at Krishnamacharya's centennial celebration, 1988.*

thirty years, Desikachar learned how to practice and teach yoga effectively. He now represents the full breadth of his father's yoga teaching.

We owe much gratitude to Krishnamacharya and his worthy son Desikachar for bringing yoga into a modern context and making it useful in our time and place.

In ancient times yoga teachings were expressed in writing as a dialogue between teacher and student. In many places throughout *The Heart of Yoga*, we use this form to communicate some of Desikachar's teaching concepts and his early background.

MARK WHITWELL: Is a teacher necessary to learn yoga, or can we learn from reading your books?

DESIKACHAR: Mark, you have been through a long journey. You met me after you learned yoga through books—good books—and you're a bright man. Your own experience shows that without a good teacher you'd be in trouble. Why? Because a yoga teacher does not deal with his students in the same way as an engineer deals with a piece of straw or metal, systematizing everything as we do in construction projects. With human beings we are working with something very different, something that cannot be systematized or defined. Each student comes to the teacher with unique experiences and an individual mind. It is difficult enough to understand this mind *with* a teacher. Without a teacher it is even more difficult. Yoga concerns the mind, and since mind is unpredictable, since mind is not easily definable, it becomes necessary to seek somebody who knows a little more than you do. I have no doubts about this.

Q: How do I find a good teacher who is right for me?

A: You must be very lucky. You may have a teacher who is not the teacher for you in the long run. To find your teacher you must be lucky—I know that. The feelings of trust and certainty and natural friendship will be there for you to enjoy.

Q: You would then certainly appreciate that relationship, if you knew that you were lucky.

A: Yes.

Q: There are so many teachers—some well known and others not so well known—and their teachings diverge in important ways. It sometimes seems confusing.

A: The confusion is not because there are so many teachers. The confusion comes when we expect standard answers, or when we are looking for something that is preconceived. Then when one teacher seems to contradict another, we are confused. A good teacher is one who will not give you an answer but allows you to find the answer in yourself. A teacher is a guide; he will show you the answer that is inside you. And there *is* a right answer.

Q: From a traditional point of view, could you describe the relationship to the teacher?

A: I always emphasize that there should be a negotiable relationship between a teacher and a student. It is as if the student has to climb the mountain for the first time but does not have any shoes and does not know the way up the mountain. The teacher must help the student up the mountain; he cannot force him or her up. The best relationship between the student and the teacher is one that is established through the compassion and understanding of the teacher. Here the responsibility rests with the teacher.

Q: Can you tell us something about your relationship with your teacher?

A: My father was my teacher and he was a very lovely person. He had an immense amount of training and knowledge. We were fifty years apart in age, so there was a great difference between us. His education and background were very different from mine, but what I remember most is that he always came to my level in working with me. I am a Western-educated person and he was a traditional teacher. He saw that I was different so he adapted his teachings to me. I took that as a great example of what we can do as teachers for others.

The fact that I was his son never interfered in the relationship, even though the relationship between a father and a son is different from the relationship between a teacher and a student. We were living in the same house with all our family members and others. I was a slow learner and would do stupid things, yet he never gave me an indication that I was lacking. He would only say words in support of me, such as, "You do not have the background I have," and he would patiently persevere with me.

Q: Was the father/son relationship there also?

A: When he was a teacher, he was a teacher. He would expect me to be on time. If he asked me to sit I would sit. That is the Indian tradition. He had the ability to separate the teacher relationship from the father relationship. I also spent a lot of time as his son, doing the natural things that a father and son do together.

Q: So you enjoyed both relationships?

A: I had the benefit of both.

Q: It seems paradoxical that you have been the yoga teacher to several great spiritual teachers such as J. Krishnamurthi and the Shankaracharya. Could you tell us how these teaching relationships have influenced you?

A: I must say that I have been very lucky to have met these people. Somehow they have the ability to accept me as a teacher. This is an extraordinary situation, as each of them is a very important person in his own way. Millions of people read their books and venerate them. They taught me that great people can be so simple, and that simplicity is an important quality in life. Another part of my learning was to be able to regard these great teachers as students. They demonstrated the attitude—the humility, dignity, and gratitude—of the student. My attitude toward my own teacher



*Father and son.*

definitely grew through the example of these great people. I am extremely grateful to them.

Q: Were they able to come to you with the attitude of the student, even though they were great teachers in their own right?

A: I remember when I would go to Krishnamurthi and teach him, he would always be on time, he would make sure that I sat before he would sit, he would make sure that there was always a carpet for me to sit upon—the best carpet—and he was always picking the best flower to give me.

Q: And were you much younger than him?

A: Yes, I was much younger, yet he always showed the dignity and gratitude of a serious student. That taught me a lot.

Q: It seems a little paradoxical that such a wise person as J. Krishnamurthi decided that he needed yoga.

A: The teachings of my father are special. Where a human being wants to be healthy, physically and mentally free from illness, this yoga is very useful. People such as Krishnamurthi believed in yoga. Krishnamurthi practiced yoga to keep himself fit and feeling vital in his older age. Some thought he was too old for yoga but we adapted the yoga for his age and medical condition and he always enjoyed it. This is what is special about my father's teaching. His teaching of yoga is not meant to make a person go to the moon or do the best and most complicated gymnastics. It is to provide what a person requires. There is something in this teaching for everyone.

Q: Does this exclude the highest realization of yoga that we may call enlightenment?

A: As I said, it provides something for everyone. Whatever is required for growth can be provided. I know some people who gave up their religion and returned to it in a renewed way once they had begun this yoga.

Q: Many of today's spiritual organizations teach some form of yoga as part of their recommended path. But many of these yoga practices seem to be quite different from your father's recommendations, or they seem to emphasize certain aspects.

A: What finally matters is what a person perceives. If somebody is happier through what these great organizations provide, then membership is right for that person. I have good friends who have greatly benefited from belonging to such organizations. They are not my students but they have learned to practice yoga in my father's way. Their lives in these organizations have become much richer and brighter through practicing yoga.

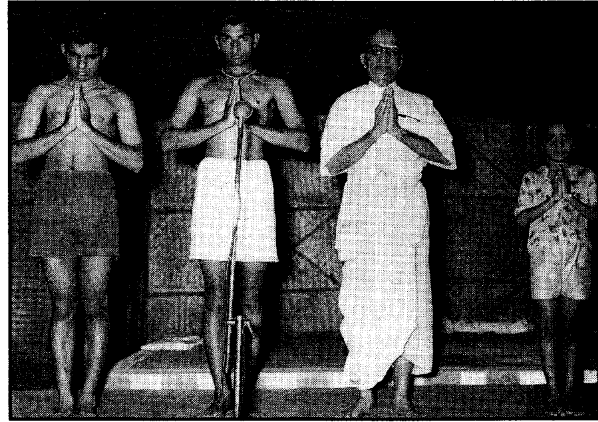
Q: Can someone stay loyal to their chosen teacher and learn a yoga practice in the Krishnamacharya way?

A: Yes. Take the case of somebody like the Shankaracharya. He is the teacher par excellence for the Hindus. They have their own philosophy and their own religious practices, but these things did not prevent the Shankaracharya from doing yoga. The Hindus asked us to teach them yoga and we did. They

are not loyal to my father. They practice as a practical requirement of the human system and they are loyal to their own tradition. There is something good about my father's teaching: it is possible not to interfere in a person's spiritual and cultural life and yet still do yoga to encourage his or her development.

**Q:** There is a wide variety of yoga practices taught, and talk of many different kinds of yoga. Why is this?

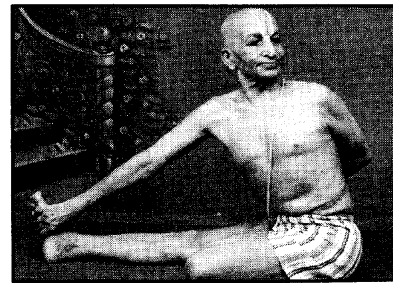
**A:** Because yoga is not fixed. Yoga is creation. I know the way that you teach will be different from the way I teach, and the way I teach is different from the way my father taught. We all have different experiences, different backgrounds, different perspectives on yoga and why it is important for us. So it is not a surprise that different people find different things through the same yoga teaching. Even in our own yoga institution different teachers will teach in different ways according to their own perspective and priorities and interests in yoga. The *Yoga Sutra* says that each person gets different things from the same teaching based on his or her own perspective. There is nothing wrong with this. This is how it is.



*Krishnamacharya and his children at a public lecture.*

**Q:** It seems a little unusual however that several teachers, all of whom were students of your father, have very different methods of teaching.

**A:** Well, here there are two questions: How long was their association with my father? And how much did they have to be on their own when they were called upon to teach? My association with my father was very long. I observed him teaching others at different stages of his life from 1960 to almost the end of his life. He was teaching different people in different ways according to their needs, their age, their health, and so on. This taught me a lot of things. Further, for those thirty years I was exposed to many aspects of his teaching. I had the real thing day after day, so I could absorb much of his teaching and at the same time I could always go back to him with questions and case studies. In that way he would help me with my teaching. Take your own case, for example. If you had some health problem, I could easily go and ask my father for help. So I had an enormous exposure that others who are now teaching were not able to enjoy. When called upon they found other ways of teaching, which is fine.



*Krishnamacharya at 79.*

**Q:** It seems that your father had a vast knowledge of yoga and religious traditions. He spent nearly three decades in the early part of this century in various traditional institutions and later with his teacher in Tibet. A great amount of information has been summarized and made useful for our modern context.

**A:** Yes, his background is wide. His own family is unique in the sense that his ancestors were all practicing yoga. So his first lessons in yoga were from his family — his father and his grandmother. He was fluent in Sanskrit at a very young age, so he could learn very quickly as he got older. He was lucky to go to Banaras and learn from the best teachers of the Indian

traditions. There he also came to know of his yoga master in Tibet. So his learning started very early and went on and on. I would say today that the condensed aspect of what he knew represents only one millionth of what he could have passed on if he had lived much longer. We have lost a lot because of his passing and we have lost a lot because more students did not stay with him and learn all that they could. What I represent is insignificant compared to the totality of my father's understanding in many areas, not just in yoga but anything in the Indian tradition, including healing and subjects like astrology and Āyurveda.

Q: So with this vast amount of knowledge he was able to understand each person's requirement in yoga.

A: Yes. My father went to Bengal and studied Āyurvedic medicine, the Indian system of healing. He knew a lot about the soul through his understanding of Āyurveda and the Upaniṣads. He knew a lot about how to improvise yoga through his guru's teaching. He knew a lot about spirituality and devotion because he was also a very religious person. He was a person who represented India in total and he could draw on his vast knowledge to help anyone who wished to do yoga. He could also do extraordinary things like stop the heartbeat and breath for long periods of time. He always told me, however, that he would teach me only what would be useful for mankind.

Q: I'd like to discuss the results brought about by the yoga practice. The yamas and niyamas appear to be very sensible and are desirable attitudes in life. Yet many people say that it is virtually impossible to change and to be more aligned to the yama and niyama recommendations. They complain that we humans never seem to live up to them.

A: Frankly, these qualities are potentials, and one person may have much more than another person. Yoga is something like a catalyst that brings out the best in us. If somebody has the predisposition to be a very sociable person, yoga will act as a catalyst to bring this out. In others this predisposition may not be there to the same extent. I know some people who are practicing much yoga, including diet changes and meditative practices, yet they remain very unfeeling people, even cruel. Some are even yoga teachers themselves. There are other people who do a few simple things in yoga and much change occurs. So yoga is a catalyst, what is called *nimitta* in Sanskrit. Its presence brings out certain changes, things that are latent and not yet obvious. However, it can only bring out what is already there. A good teacher can bring out these qualities, no matter how small the potential. If they do not exist, however, nothing can bring them out.

Q: Do the qualities of yama and niyama simply come as a result of doing a yoga practice, rather than struggling to change?

A: Struggling is antithetical to yama and niyama. If the potential is there, then yoga will be a catalyst toward growth. Simply struggling will not produce a change.

Q: Some people say that physical yoga is not necessary or is even a distraction for spiritual understanding. What do you think?

