

Interview with Danny Paradise by Barbara Bettencourt of Portugal

1- There are many types of yoga, and its not always easy to understand the differences. What's the main difference between ashtanga yoga and other types of yoga?

Ashtanga Yoga has specific sequences of postures that incorporate internal locking and continuous movement aligned with deep breath that creates deep heat, sweat, purification, extreme flexibility, strength and balance. The practices of Ashtanga Yoga represent the most concentrated practices in the studies of Hatha Yoga. They create the deepest elimination of toxins, the deepest purification and healing force (physical, emotional, spiritual) of Yoga. The order of the sequences represents the science of unlocking the body, creating deep levels of strength, flexibility and balance. Other studies of Hatha Yoga are all valuable in the healing force they create as well as the levels flexibility of and strength that are explored but the physical results are generally more moderate. The practices also create total independence, personal authority and personal responsibility because once the practices are learned you can do them on your own.

Each sequence is approximately 1.5 to 2 hours long depending upon how fast or slow a person is breathing or moving. The beginning sequence is called the Primary Series. The 2nd Sequence is the Intermediate series and the following sequences are considered Advanced practices. The Primary series is a lifetime practice but many people are able to further challenge themselves by learning the Intermediate or 2nd series. The Advanced series is accessible only to some though many people are able to learn aspects of all the sequences... The practices of Ashtanga must be modified daily according to energetic levels, healing processes and structural changes the individual practitioner is experiencing.

2- Ashtanga is a physically demanding type of yoga, that appeals specially to discipline and hard work with the body (its not a contemplative technique). Is it more adequate for those who feel the need to do that work with the body in order to get where yoga proposes (illumination/liberation)?

Ashtanga Yoga IS a contemplative technique. It demands and creates focus, deep concentration, and full attention. Therefore it is meditative. All Yoga practices are prayers to the Universal creative Spirit helping the practitioner understand how to achieve the deepest potential in one's life. Yoga is a devotional science recognizing the existence of God rather than a search for God. With the creation of stillness, slowing down the mind and increasing levels of intuition, perception, insight and seeing, communication with the soul and the Great Soul are facilitated. The concentrated focus on deep breath helps initiate slower brain wave function. The brain moves from regular waking state (Beta) to a slower brain wave function or Alpha state through the breath. This is the beginning of stillness in the mind and can lead to further slowing down of brain wave pulse to initiate a lucid dreaming state or trance state at the end of a deep practice of Asana or pranayama when one is resting. This is the Theta state.

These are desperate times and deep healing is necessary for every person on earth to continuously eliminate the effects of pollution, chemicals, industrial waste, antibiotics etc that accumulate in our food, water and air and consequently are imbedded in our body. Everyone on earth now carries 80 to 300 industrial chemicals in their bloodstream. The consequences are vast increases in allergies, cancer, lung conditions, stress, anxiety and diseases of all kinds. Therefore deep eliminative processes are required these days. This to me is one of the reasons for the evolutionary leap in the depth of the practices. Desperate times call for the need for much more deeper practices. Stress and anxiety are doorways to disease and all Yoga helps modify or eliminate these by bringing us completely into the present, slowing the heart, calming the mind...

Illumination and liberation can occur in all forms of Yoga. Awareness (or being awake in the moment), the creation of freedom in one's life to be who one is, to create one's dream, to live life fully, with joy and compassionately are all the natural results of the disciplines of Yoga.

3- Why choose Ashtanga and not another type of yoga? Is Ashtanga indicated for a specific type of personality, for instance?

Ashtanga Yoga attracts people of all walks of life, all ages and all professions. It is cross-cultural. I always say that the Ashtanga practices attract the very intelligent and the very desperate...or perhaps a mix of the two. When people know they need a deep healing they are very drawn to these practices. The practices are very concentrated and endlessly challenging so they attract people who want to do deep work on themselves. The challenges draw people who want to achieve deep levels of balance, strength and flexibility. They also lead people to the understanding of how to age with vitality, health, peace and expanding wisdom.

Ultimately as people go through physical and emotional healing and changes from the practices they often have to radically alter their approach so Ashtanga Yoga becomes Hatha Yoga also. Some days the practices have to be done more slowly and with less energy if a person is going through transformation, physical or structural changes, or healing of any nature.

4- Being a physically demanding discipline, Ashtanga is often used by dancers or athletes that search a more profound control of their bodies. But isn't this a rather limited approach do yoga? What do you think should be the purpose of practicing yoga in the first place?

Whatever draws people into Yoga is perfect. Often athletes and dancers are in profound need of healing. So besides being challenged by the practices, people learn that the techniques heal injuries they've sustained in their other disciplines. Shortly into the practices people realize that their minds are being deeply affected as well for mind, body and spirit are intimately linked. As stated earlier, perception, intuition, insight and ways of seeing are affected and fine-tuned. It becomes clear that the practices are part of the soul's evolutionary process. IN fact elements of these practices have been around as long as mankind has existed. Taking care of ourselves on deep levels prescribed by our ancestors in visionary communication with nature is the origin of these teachings...So for all people who enter into any form of Yoga they are participating in a 'Sacred Trust' and the consequences are far reaching. These practices bring the Spirit back into the body, remind people of the sacred nature of existence, the sacred blessing of the gift of the human mind, body and spirit, and the deep responsibility that we have as human beings to live compassionately, with tenderness, with love, peace and happiness. It becomes apparent that these practices teach us how to age with grace, vitality and health. After all the human body and mind are gifts, on temporary loan to us...The practices are radically altering the way people are aging. People are discovering these are the ways in which to age slowly and gracefully...and consequently never ending up in a deteriorated condition over many years in an old age home being wheeled around. The practices can be maintained through our 60's, 70's, 80's and 90's!

5- Sometimes Ashtanga is seen as pure contortionism. Obviously putting the leg behind the ears alone is not a sign yoga or illumination, but what is the purpose of being able to do such things in the first place? Or are they just a mere consequence of the body control that arises naturally with the practice?

These are consequences of unlocking the body and mind and generating tremendous flexibility, strength and balance through regular practice and immersion in an ancient study that is designed to create the deepest potential possible for human life. These are also the challenges built into the practice and the gifts that come with years of regular practice. But these are just by-products of the practices. The most important results are the creation of personal empowerment, personal responsibility, stillness, inner strength, health, vitality, peace, happiness, compassion and an ability to step outside the regular order of life and become aware, sensitive, responsible... Aligning ourselves with the Spirit, with our soul, with our imagination...Learning that we can and must become more free as we age, wilder and less domesticated!!!

6- Ashtanga is characterized by its extreme difficulty. It is said that there are few who can make it through the first series... A person with more physical limitation, or an elderly one can make it through all the series?

I've been teaching for over 30 years...I've had people in my classes from the ages of 7 to 80. Anyone can learn the practices but they have to be modified according to individual ability, age, physical problems, previous injuries, accidents, history etc. The practices of Ashtanga are just guidelines and a good teacher knows how to adjust them for each individual. I've met men and women around the world who have even started Ashtanga

Yoga in their mid 50's and within 4 or 5 years they've become very advanced and are practicing 2nd and 3rd series. When one becomes regular at the practices then the limitations of the mind and body fall away very quickly. This is a quantum science. At the same time it's important to recognize that the primary series is also a lifetime practice.

7- Even if one does not see yoga as a sport, it may be difficult to escape some lesions if you practice intensively, even if you try to respect your body and not overcome its limits. Ashtanga, some say, can be especially prone to repetition lesions (stress fractures), because you repeat the asanas so many times. Do you agree?

Repetitive stress and lesions are possible but I was taught from the beginning never to push into pain, never to create any pain and to modify the practices when necessary so each day is a totally different story. If a person is very ambitious and achievement oriented they will create deep injuries. However if one realizes this is a lifetime practice then they will modify the practice daily according to current healing processes, energetic levels, personal history and levels of concentration. People go through very profound healing with Ashtanga Yoga and all Yoga practices. Deep structural changes occur depending upon a person's previous postural habits, genetics, etc. All weaknesses rise to the surface, all traumas from the past, physical and psychological, all hidden skeletons, everything from the past...this lifetime and beyond, that haven't been healed or corrected come forward in these deep healing explorations. Then through modification of the practice so no pain is created during the session, deep oxygenation and the release of toxins through the creation of deep heat, everything can be healed. Ultimately Ashtanga Yoga is a 15 to 25 year programme to create all the flexibility, strength, balance possible for the human mind and body. That is if a person practices 5 or 6 days a week.

8- Ashtanga its not one of the classic types of yoga (raja, hatha, jnana, karma, bhakti...). You say Ashtanga is basically a more concentrated type of hatha. Why the need of creating something slightly different, like Ashtanga or iyengar, besides the classical types of yoga?

Ashtanga Yoga is an energetic form. Many people want the energy that the practices generate. Ultimately as I mentioned earlier some days the practices must be radically modified and slowed down so ultimately Ashtanga Yoga it is just Hatha Yoga. But on days when a person has full energy and wants to continuously build strength, boost the immune system to its deepest levels, purify and heal then they can put all their energy into the practices. Yoga is an evolutionary study. Krishnamacharya created an evolutionary leap in the study and practices of Yoga by using the information he acquired in his lifetime of studies of Yoga and consolidating his knowledge into the teachings he passed on to K. Pattabhi Jois, BKS Iyengar, his son Desikacar, Indra Devi (the first Western woman to practice and teach under Krishnamacharya's guidance) and many others. To each of his students he passed on different elements of his own knowledge according to how he felt they could absorb the teachings.

Ashtanga Yoga is one of the classic types of Yoga and encompasses the eight limbs of Yoga including Hatha Yoga.

9- Ashtanga is a very recent type of yoga; it lacks the legitimacy of those mentioned by Patanjali, etc. Yoga Korunta is a manuscript that no one saw, except the disciples of Krishnamacharya that have succeeded each other in a dynastic kind of way. You are against the figure of the guru in the first place. Why this necessity of creating legitimacy around some inspired scriptures to legitimate the origin of these techniques?

That's a very odd statement, that 'Ashtanga Yoga lacks the legitimacy of those (Yogas) mentioned by Patanjali' etc.

As stated earlier Krishnamacharya created an evolutionary leap in the practices and teaching of Yoga. He was the 'Grandfather' of most of the most current practices of Yoga that are taught around the world today. He drew from many sources including his own teacher in the Tibetan Himalayas, his family (He was born into a family of Yogis), and many other lineages he encountered on his journeys throughout India and Tibet to take

the practices to new levels of healing, meditation, awareness and purification. Yoga is about evolution and even now people all over the world are taking the philosophy and practices to new levels of exploration.

Everyone who speaks of Yoga, teaches or practices it has their own personal way of describing what they are up to and what they are discovering. This is the beauty of the evolutionary trail of Yoga.

All the recent new variations on Ashtanga Yoga such as Vinyasa Yoga, Power Yoga, Flow Yoga, Jiva Mukti Yoga, Anusara Yoga (a derivative form of Iyengar's teachings) and many other derivative forms came from people who studied Ashtanga Yoga and then created their own variations on the form. Ashtanga Yoga draws on elements of Yoga that are thousands or perhaps tens of thousands of years old and consolidates elements of the study that were inspired by many different branches of the practice. Hundreds of thousands to millions of people around the world are now practicing Ashtanga Yoga and it's many variations and derivative forms. Do numbers of practitioners create legitimacy? Do books create legitimacy? Do scriptures create legitimacy?

Anyone these days can publish a book or even a scripture that they say they were given by visionary trance or in a meditation, or as a 'channeling'. Does that make it legitimate?

Originally all the practices and teachings of Yoga were orally transmitted.

The texts and scriptures came thousands or perhaps tens of thousands of years after the creation of the practices to codify the information and prevent it from being lost. When I learned the practices initially from the first Western teachers, David Williams and Nancy Gilgoff, it was through direct teaching and daily practice until it was memorized. As in the days of the original practices and teachings they taught the practices orally outdoors (in Hawaii).

I don't believe in experts or authorities in any field. Krishnamacharya did not have disciples or consider himself a guru. He was a professor of the studies of Yoga. Yoga is about evolution. Evolution means expansion of consciousness. Evolution refers to the discovery of truth. The truth is that we are unlimited, eternal and free. The proof of 'legitimacy' is in the results of the practices for millions of practitioners around the world. The proof as they say 'is in the pudding'...

10- You began practicing pretty early. Can you imagine what would you be doing today if you haven't found Ashtanga?

Darling....I would have been dead! Yoga has literally saved my life on numerous occasions through giving me the strength and clarity to survive life-threatening situations. If I wouldn't have been dead then I would be slumped over some desk acting like I was dead!

My practice has allowed me to travel the world continuously over the last 30 years teaching and inter-acting with communities around the earth interested in the teachings.

11- It's inevitable to ask about Madonna, Sting or Eddie Vedder. How did you end up being their professor? I think in Sting's case you took the initiative of coming to him, is that true?

I play music as well as teach Yoga. Since the early 70's I would play music in bars, restaurants, clubs, hotels, concert halls etc all over the world. In the early 80's I'd be passing through England on my way to and from India and I would get work teaching Yoga as well as playing music in London. I use to play in a Greek Restaurant in Fulham Broadway in London. One evening a young man came up to me and told me he played music too. He said he liked one of my songs in particular and asked if I'd like to try and record it with him at his home. His name was Dominic Miller. We started hanging out a bit, recording and playing and I also showed him some Yoga. He came with me to Egypt at one point to help me to record some songs in a studio in Cairo. He is now regarded as one of the greatest guitar players in the world. I recognized how amazing he was back in those days in London. A few years later (1989) I came through England and Dominic was playing with Phil Collins. The next year he was in Sting's band and he's been playing with Sting now for 20 years on recordings

and tours. I suggested to Dominic to see if Sting was interested in learning Yoga. This was 1990. The next day Dominic asked Sting, but since the deeper teachings were unknown at the time, Sting initially wasn't that interested. He thought Yoga was for little old ladies in leotards...So the following day I gave Dominic some of my photos of advanced Yoga positions to show Sting. From that point on Sting wanted to meet me. Shortly after I began teaching Sting and his wife Trudie. A year later I went on a tour of Europe with Sting and his band. I began teaching all the members of Sting's band (David Sancious, Vinnie Coliuta...) as well as his friends, accountant, and eventually many people in his network. Sting introduced me to Paul Simon on that tour who he was doing a show with. Later Paul contacted me and I started teaching Paul and his wife Edie Brickell. Sting's accountant, Mike McGuinly, called me around 1991 or '92 in the summer to meet Eddie Vedder and introduce the practices to him. A few years later Madonna watched a class I was doing with Sting and from that point she wanted to learn....Sting also introduced me to John McEnroe, Patty Smythe, Lyle Lovett, Andrea Griminelli (classical flutist), and many others who have studied over the years with me. Others such as Bob Weir, Mickey Hart, Graham Nash and Donna Karan (DKNY) I met through my travels and teaching around the world. Through Paul Simon I met Chris Botti, Steve Gadd and others and began teaching them as well. Chris is one of the world's most famous and talented jazz trumpet players. Andrea Griminelli introduced me to Luciano Pavarotti who I began teaching in the mid 90's.

12- Is yoga specially effective to those who work with creativity, like artists. David Lynch says that meditation helps him being more creative, for instance...

Yoga expands awareness and initiates a connection with the soul as all Shamanic practices do. Imagination can be considered a force of illumination of the soul. Creativity and imagination are of course intimately linked. So as consciousness expands so does creativity. One of the teachings of Tantra Yoga is that we all have unlimited creativity.

One of the definitions or results of Yoga is fulfilling personal destiny. We are creating our destiny as we move through life. If you're in a state of constant deterioration it's much more difficult to fulfil your dream, or 'unlock your sealed instructions'.

Yoga creates life force, clarity, health, and as I said earlier it is an evolutionary tool of consciousness. So for artists it is a magical tool for increasing levels of creativity, awareness, sensitivity and clarity.

13- Do you believe in a Shamanic origin of yoga? That's why you advocate a strong connection with nature and its natural rhythms, as well as an emphasis on environment and food/nutrition issues?

The Yogis were Shamans and still are. The word Shaman may have a Sanskrit origin in the word 'Svram' which means to develop heat and practice austerities...The original sects of Yogis in the subcontinent of India around 2500 years ago were called 'Shramanas'...They were wild, freedom thinkers, anarchists, outside the regular order of life and were also advisors to the Kings...Even today the Yogis fulfil that function. They lived in Nature and as I mentioned earlier, they were in visionary communication with Nature. Nature was their spiritual guide and teacher. These practices or (variations of them) and ideas also existed throughout history in Egypt, in North, Central and South America and throughout Polynesia, Aborginal Australia...The understanding of the need to create stillness, meditation and communication with the Spirit or soul has been explored for tens of thousands of years in all Indigenous native cultures. The ancient Mayans practiced Yoga. They had a definition of Kundalini that they say dates back 100,000 years. They called it Kuthalini but it is the same definition as in the world of Yoga. Perhaps these ideas arose simultaneously throughout the earth or perhaps there was an ancient exchange of information tens of thousands of years ago. Every Indigenous culture had their own austere heat building practices of 'Yoga'...meditation, fasting, magical plant practices (which also may have been the origin of Yoga), sweat lodge, Sun dance, Vision Quest, Drumming and music, chanting...Practices that initiated changes in the brain to slow down brain wave function and enter into altered states of consciousness to heal, to communicate with Spirit, to communicate with the soul, with our ancestors, with Nature....

Shamanism is education and natural science...a transmission of knowledge. Man is a Spiritual/religious animal. At some point in evolution, humans begin to ask questions and seek answers...how we arrived here, where are we heading, what are our 'personal' instructions, how was the universe created...what keeps everything alive? Yoga teachers hopefully transmit knowledge that creates healing, caring, awareness, sensitivity, responsibility, compassion, communication with the Great Spirit. Like a grandfather to his children, like a principal to his teachers, like a doctor to his patients or like a true leader to his people...the knowledge is transmitted. It's all Shamanism! As Daniel Pinchbeck states in his book 'Breaking Open The Head', "Shamanism is a technology for exploring nonordinary states of consciousness in order to accomplish specific purposes: healing, divination, and communication with the spirit realm." Yoga contains all these elements. It initiates ecstasy by affecting the neurotransmitters in the brain that is responsible for activation of serotonin.

The purer we eat, the simpler we live, contribute towards clarity and our ability to communicate with our own soul...We are nature and we all have a nature soul. Yoga is a journey back to nature. Because of the deterioration of the environment through negligence it is the responsibility of all conscious beings to help restore, preserve and protect nature.

14- Does ashtanga shares a tantric vision of yoga? (basically whats the theoretic basis/ or darshana of ashtanga?)

Shamanism, Yoga and Tantra share the same definition of Tantra...'Every event in life is seen within a Spritual context'. Another definition that I like is 'Tantric approach integrates consciousness in mind and behavior so that all actions express our inherent Spiritual nature.' Ashtanga Yoga is a devotional science like all Yoga. It recognizes the existence of the Great Spirit, the supreme creative force in the Universe, the Absolute...and uses meditative practices to help honor life, the human mind, body and Spirit and to facilitate individual communication with the Great Spirit. Darshan derives from the word Drsh which means to 'see' as in beholding...not looking at something like a tourist but true seeing. The Darshan of Yoga as I perceive it is the recognition of the meeting of the ordinary world with the extraordinary...Seeing beyond the limitations of the eyes to deeper levels of reality. As in the true definition of 'Maya'...we are learning in these explorations to recognize that we are only seeing a piece of the puzzle...and by expanding consciousness we are able to see beyond what the eyes offer...Tantra Yoga seeks to teach that there are no limitations to existence, to creativity, to access to knowledge and that we are not bound by time or space...Ashtanga Yoga helps people to access their potential and break all limitations-physical, mental, emotional and spritual.

15- You are against the "guru" figure, but the ancient traditions seem to give some importance to a guru who can guide the yogi through the stages of illumination, and, for instance, control the sidhis or the ascension of kundalini... Even if we don't become dependent on the guru, is it still not important to have one? Or do you believe that one can come across those changes alone without any danger?

To me it's important to have teachers for periods of time but not teachers who create dependence, followings, disciples etc. The Buddha said 'You are your only Master, Who Else? No one purifies another'....

I'm looking for teachers who nurture independence, freedom, self exploration, and personal evolution. The Guru may light your candle....but you have to carry it yourself. The Shaman may lead you to a door, but you have to enter it yourself. As the ancient Egyptians have said...'The only leader on this perilous road is the intelligence of the heart, the secret drummer who gives the right beat to our evolution'....Yoga is that point where we go from a meandering evolution to a place of personal responsibility and the creation of consciousness on our path. So we become individually responsible for evolution. Everyone who does Ashtanga Yoga for period of time recognizes that the practices are designed to be self-teaching and self-correcting after a certain amount of classes. The real key is doing the practices alone and developing a personal, private practice. Then a different experience and understanding emerges. As Krishnamurti told Desikachar...'Don't become a guru....another monkey'! I feel Krishnamurti had the true message. Freedom is an individual path...

If an individual learns the practices and is consistent in his practice then if kundalini awakening occurs he/she can deal with the awakening and absorb the information safely so the energy systems of the body don't burn out. Even in the deepest Shamanic rituals, when a person is going through a difficult experience the guides of the ceremonies generally only make their presence known but offer no assistance. The deepest revelations must be processed individually because they are related to individual evolution and karma. We will all have to face the Spirit of Death on our own as well. In many instances the Shamanic rituals of native indigenous cultures help people understand the nature of death, life after death and learning to overcome the fear of death. Yoga has a similar purpose in regards to processing individual karma and understanding the processes of death. Kundalini refers to transcendence. Transcendence is about rising above the limitations of this world. When awakening occurs it is about the fusing of the mortal consciousness with Divine consciousness which is also what happens at the point of death. Experiencing awakening and deep transcendence are preparations for the transition at the end of our lives. These can be initiated through many of the Shamanic practices around the earth including pranayama. If one has a regular, personal, private spiritual disciple then they can process these experiences.

16- How was your personal evolution regarding this (the previous question issue)?

The Yogis have always been known as anarchists, freedom thinkers, outside the regular order of life and advisors to the kings. I've always had a problem with 'authorities' and especially 'spiritual authorities'. I've never wanted a guru or a spiritual leader whom I wanted to follow nor have I met anyone I wanted to follow! When I first heard Krishnamurti speak in Ojai in the late '70s after I began learning Yoga my instincts were confirmed that following anyone in a spiritual lineage was a mistake and not the real path of evolution. As I became more deeply immersed in the practices of Yoga I also recognized that the practices were designed to be self-teaching and self-correcting creating personal authority and personal responsibility. Watching how 'disciples' of many spiritual lineages behave was also very illuminating. As one of my friends and taught me... 'Each teacher draws the students whom he or she deserves.'

Teachers who desire to create dependency draw needy people. Those who wish to create independence and freedom draw individuals who wish to be independent and free. It's not about how many students one has but rather how many masters one is helping create and nurture.

I have had numerous experiences in the Amazon in healing rituals over the past 18 years. These rituals confirmed to me the Shamanic nature of Yoga and the relationship of all Shamanism in the world with the teachings of Yoga. Shamanism/Yoga are the oldest healing traditions, the oldest Spiritual explorations. The Yogis/Shamans were the earliest pioneers of consciousness. Through my Shamanic initiations in the Amazon I became immersed in the current teachings of the elders of Native North and South American indigenous cultures. The expression of Spirituality and awakening consciousness of these elders has beautiful correlations to the classical traditions and philosophy of Yoga.

17- Do you think you live/incorporate the ideal of Yoga in your life (trying not to ask if you are illuminated)?

I feel that I am in a process of evolution. I'm learning all the time and constantly increasing my levels of awareness and exploration. I don't claim to be an authority or master. I do feel that I live freely, consciously, independently, compassionately and as well as possible in line with the will of the Spirit. I'm a lover of the sacred but not exemplary. I do the best I can!

However it doesn't matter the way I live or how I incorporate the ideals of Yoga into my life...What's important is how YOU live!

18 - Supposedly, yoga must not be a business. Yet, many teachers and instructors deal with this issue: they know yoga must be freely given, but if they earn a living with it, they become dependent on yoga to get money to survive. And they ask themselves: how is it possible to live being a yoga instructor

and not being dependent on it to survive? And how do you do it personally? you charge for your workshops etc..

If Yoga must not be a business then who's making the billions of dollars each year in the 'business' of Yoga? Yoga is now a career choice throughout the world with schools charging enormous amounts of money for 'teacher training' programs. Advertising for Yoga classes, retreats, DVDs, books, products etc in international magazines, and even insurance companies promoting Yoga as a best option for preventative medicine is just the beginning...

For many years I taught strictly by donation as well as travelled according to invitations. No one can travel for free or live without some financial support. I have a close friend who demonstrated to me early on that it was unnecessary to charge for Yoga and for years I travelled the world without charging and learned that this was entirely possible. Teaching Yoga is very challenging and demanding work. Later on when I was teaching with a friend he demanded that we set a minimum charge for classes so people would recognize the teachings had a value. At the same time we would also make the classes available by donation or contribution. Some people would always take advantage if it was possible and not give anything at all. There needs to be an equal exchange of energy. I continue to accept any serious practitioner in my classes even if they have no money to contribute. I also let the studios or Yoga centers in various countries who invite me set their own charge according to what is possible for people in their region. It's all about an exchange of energy. Unfortunately now many people with very little experience or understanding are teaching Yoga as if it were solely a commercial commodity. Many new teachers are more concerned with advertising campaigns than with passing on ancient spiritual teachings, healing arts and evolutionary techniques.

Yoga is a 'Sacred Trust' and it takes depth of practice, maturity and experience to understand this.

19 - It seems to me, observing some more experienced teachers, that they generally pass through different stages: initially giving more importance to the practice of yoga techniques, and as the years pass, giving it less importance, saying that ultimately yoga is a state of being and if you realise that you wouldn't even need yoga... do you agree?

The practices of Yoga are gifts to mankind from the Great Spirit. As stated earlier they are designed to teach people how to age with vitality, energy and health for their whole life so that aging doesn't become a miserable process of long drawn out deterioration.

The physical practices are a small portion of the day, perhaps anywhere from 45 minutes to two or even 3 hours. They are ultimately insurance for living life healthfully. Growing old is about growing strong like a tree...if a person takes care of themselves on deeply prescribed levels that have been outlined for tens of thousands of years then hopefully dreams can be continuously fulfilled, life can be an endlessly creative process and death will be a rapid, peaceful process at a ripe old age.

Yoga as a state of being implies as well that as people become healthy, awakened, conscious then they become more tuned in to their responsibility on earth. The biggest movement on earth now are from people who are working to reconstitute the world. You don't have to do a physical Yoga practice to be a Yogi or to be awakened. After all Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela etc never did Yoga. In slums, refugee camps, ghettos, war zones, orphanages, schoolrooms, companies, colleges, jungles, villages, organic farms, deserts, there are millions of people working to help improve the quality of life on earth. As Paul Hawken says "No one knows how many groups and organizations are working on the most salient issues of our day: climate change, poverty, hunger, deforestation, peace, water, conservation, restoration of nature, human rights etc. This is the largest movement the world has ever seen". Yoga centers around the world are also becoming action networks to initiate responsibility to use our voices to make positive change in ourselves and our world, to help eliminate chemicals from our food and water, support organic agriculture, educate and illuminate, restore nature and improve people's lives.

20 - If you could recommend a small change in someone's life to be happy, what would it be?

Truly follow your dream! Will yourself to be happy, peaceful and in a process of evolution and it will happen. Recognize that the difficulties that we encounter in our life are challenges to our growth and evolution that somehow we have called into our realm of experience. So then we must develop the strength and capacity to meet the challenge. This is where the practices and philosophy of Yoga come into play. Simply recognize the magic and sacred nature of existence, the blessings we truly have and everything becomes magic! We carry all the joy, happiness, peace, compassion, tenderness, strength and kindness in our own beings.

Another simple way to create happiness in oneself is to make someone else happy, do something tender and compassionate for someone and you will become joyous, peaceful and ecstatic!

Peace and blessings,
Danny Paradise October 2009
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