

Yan Deretsky (a.k.a. Yan Dhyansky) has been interested in *Yoga* since his early teens. He began studying *Yoga* while living in the former Soviet Union in 1969. From 1969 to 1976, Yan read and practiced *Yoga* from books that he and his friends translated and self-published since these books were prohibited in the Soviet Union. In 1979, Yan fulfilled his dream and went to Madras, India to study *Yoga* with Śrī TKV Desikachar.

From 1982 through 1992, Yan taught *Yoga*, provided *Yoga* therapy and teacher training at Pine Street Clinic in San Anselmo, California. During that time, Yan gave thousands of private lessons to individuals from all ethnic groups, backgrounds and health conditions.

In 1992, Yan moved to Seattle where he started working as a job placement specialist, single-handedly finding jobs for more than 1200 refugees from all over the world. At that time, Yan saw the need to serve the community by using his *Yoga* studies to help others find a productive way to earn a living and start fresh in a new country. Thanks to Śrī Desikachar's teachings, Yan knew at that moment in time, his purpose was to make a difference in someone's life as a job placement specialist.

Yan managed a mental health and home care agency; he continues to help refugees, immigrants and other newcomers learn how to access social services, as well as how to defend their rights if needed.

Yan's *Yoga* studies - using therapy as a modality have successfully helped him overcome personal health issues. Thanks to his own life experiences, he has a deeper understanding for the kinds of problems, issues and challenges individuals face on a daily basis. And, therefore, now provides *Yoga* therapy as a way to help those in need.



MY TEACHER - ŚRĪ TKV DESIKACHAR

YAN Y DERETSKY

I am both honored and humbled to share my experiences with my teacher and friend, TKV Desikachar. He used to call his students – “friends.” My impression is that with each of his students, he had personal relationship. Also what and how he taught his students was unique and

specific to each of them. This description of my personal experiences with him during the twenty-three years of my association with Desikachar is just a small glimpse of his personality and what he had to offer as a *Yoga* Teacher. I have very little knowledge of how he worked with other students or what he taught them. He had a highly individualised and personal approach to how he taught and related differently to each of his students. I remember, one day in July of 2002, he told my wife and me that what he taught us and how he worked with us was different from his approach with others.

HOW I GOT INTERESTED IN YOGA IN FORMER SOVIET UNION

I was born and grew up in Leningrad, Soviet Union, which is now Saint Petersburg, Russia. My first experience with *Yoga* was when I was only seven years old. One dark winter night, my elder brother, Zach, came home from school and told me a story of some strange people who lived in India and who practiced something called, “*Yoga*.” I do not remember anything else he told me, except that when he said word “*Yoga*” I became very emotional and my heart started beating fast! Ten years later, after finishing high school and getting into Leningrad State University, I became dissatisfied with the Marxist ideology that denied the existence of God and any spiritual approach to life. I wanted to know, “Why I am here?”, “Who am I?”, “What is this all about?” “How can I find the meaning of life?”

Accidentally, I came across a Buddhist text, the Dhammapada and was deeply moved by it. However, a highly educated professor and a friend of my brother’s explained to me what was taught by Buddha was only possible two thousand years ago and now it is no longer possible. I got very sad on hearing this. Then, a few months later, my classmate Misha gave me a Russian translation of ‘Commentaries on Living’ by J. Krishnamurti. It was an “illegal” translation

as the Soviet Government did not approve of such writings. I was deeply moved by that book and spontaneously became a vegetarian. Some time later, Misha (the same classmate) gave me a hand-written translation of the book entitled “*Hatha Yoga*” by Theos Bernard. In this book he describes his year long study of *Yoga* in India in the 1930s. He also quotes various passages from *Hatha-yoga-pradīpikā*. Immediately, my friend and I began to practice some of those *Āsana-s* and *Kriyā-s* described in that book. I never liked team sports as they were all quite rough in the Soviet Union. My first experience doing some *Yoga* postures was very positive. From my memory, for the first time in my life, I felt some sense of comfort. I remember staying in *Bhujāṅgāsana* for a few minutes and having a sense of peace. At that time, we had no idea that *Āsana-s* could be practiced dynamically. *Hatha-yoga-pradīpikā* states that one should master an *Āsana* for one *Yāma* which is about 3.5 hours. I was able to find a few translations of *Hatha-yoga-pradīpikā*, *Śiva Samhitā* and *Gheraṇḍa Samhitā*, that were published before the Russian revolution of 1917. However, I never heard about *Yogasūtra-s* until I came to India.

INDIA CALLING!

After a few years of reading underground translations of various *Yoga* books including ‘Autobiography of *Yogi*’ by Yogananda, books by Shivananda, Iyengar and others, I tried to practice *Yoga* by using those books, but often I felt lost and confused. I wanted to have a real teacher! I often dreamed of going to India in search of a teacher; however, at that time in Soviet Union it was impossible to go to a foreign country for somebody like me who was not a member of a communist party. Borders of the former Soviet Union were called, “Iron Curtain,” not by accident. I myself saw that border. It was protected by two rows of barbed wire, German Shephard dogs and guards with Kalashnikovs. I was only able to come as a refugee to the United States in 1976 after the death of my parents.

FINDING MY TEACHER

After coming to the United States, I settled in San Diego. I had neither money to go to India nor any idea of how to find a *Yôga* teacher even if I got there.

I was brainwashed by stories from books like ‘Autobiography of *Yôgi*’ by Yogananda where he describes how he met his teacher, Yuktेश्वar one day on a street. As soon as they saw each other, they were instantly connected! I looked around to see what was available in the United States in terms of *Yôga* studios and *Yôga* teachers. What I saw was deeply disappointing. One day, I bought a copy of the *Yôga Journal*. Looking through its pages I was repulsed. For me, *Yôga* was always a spiritual discipline and practice. I saw nothing spiritual in that *Yôga Journal*.

While living in San Diego, I was corresponding with Krishnamurti Foundation in Ojai and expressed my desire to resettle there in order to meet Krishnamurti. After some time, I got an invitation from Krishnamurti Foundation to come to Ojai. I was offered a chance to stay with Alan and Helen Hooker, who owed a famous Ranch House restaurant in Ojai and who were friends with Krishnamurti. When I came to Ojai in the fall of 1977, I was told by Krishnamurti Foundation that Mr. and Mrs. Hooker had other visitors and that instead of staying with them, I was to stay with Sonia Nelson. Sonia, at that time, was a music teacher at the Krishnamurti school. Now, Sonia is renowned teacher of *Vedic* chanting.

At Sonia’s house I saw a picture of a handsome man wearing Indian garments. Sonia told me that this man was her husband, Neil Nelson who was studying *Yôga* with Desikachar in Madras. This was the very first time I heard Sir’s name. After a while, I was able to have a few private meetings with Krishnamurti. From Krishnamurti, I found out that TKV Desikachar had been teaching *Yôga* to him. At that time, I told myself that this was the teacher I want to study from. A few months



later, Sonia’s husband Neil Nelson returned from Madras, and I began taking lessons from him. Initially, I was quite resistant, because what he taught me was very different from what I learned from books in Russia. In addition to being a *Yôga* teacher, Neil was a great cook and after eating a few of his South Indian meals I began to trust him. I also wanted to go to Madras to study directly with Sir; however, I did not have money for airplane tickets and living expenses in India.

SMALL MIRACLE

Life was not easy for me in the United States. It was during the recession in the United States. I was unemployed for some time and I finally I found a job as a cabinet maker. My salary was barely enough to pay for my living expenses. I did not have any extra money to fund my trip to India. All that changed one night. That late night, I was driving home and it was raining heavily, which is a rare occurrence in Southern California. Suddenly, an old pickup truck appeared in front of me. It lost control and crossed into my lane. I hit the windshield with my head. I did not lose consciousness but I was bleeding profusely. I was injured badly, but was lucky not to lose my left eye. After a few weeks of recovery, I got a small financial settlement from my insurance company. Now, I had enough money to go to India. Immediately, I quit my job. My coworkers and supervisors were shocked that I was going to India to study *Yôga*! I wrote a letter to Desikachar and he replied that I could come.

MEETING ŚRĪ TKV DESIKACHAR AT KYM IN MADRAS

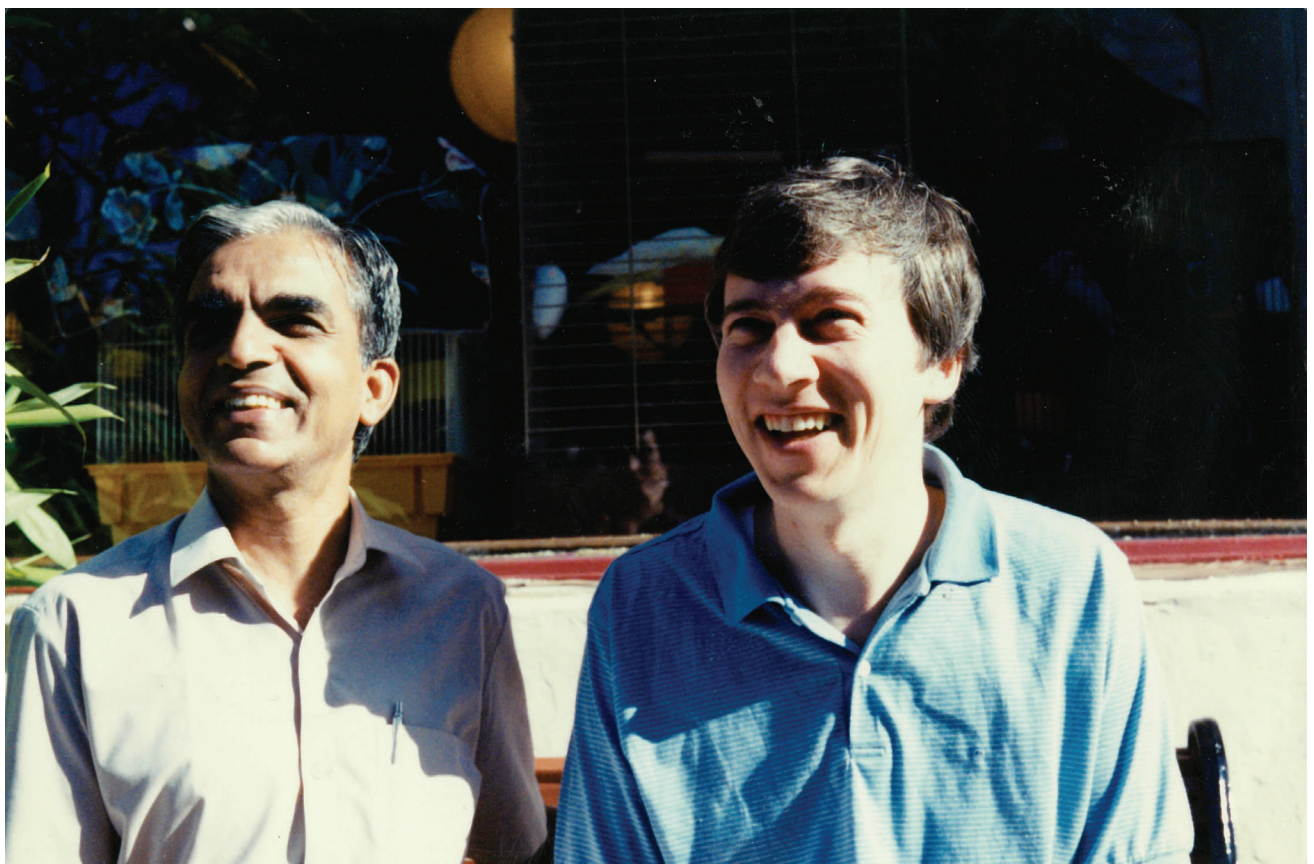
I came to Madras in November of 1979 and after settling in Theosophical Society in Adyar, I went to meet Desikachar at KYM, that was then located on Saint Mary's Road. In my mind, I was dreaming of meeting somebody like *Babaji*, with long flowing hair who would tell me, "My son where have you been these last few lives? I've been waiting for you!" Instead, I met a man wearing western clothes, who looked more like an engineer than a *Yoga* teacher. I was slightly disappointed but was quickly impressed by his wit and jokes. I told him that while living in the Soviet Union, I had dreamt about finding a *Yoga* teacher in India. I also told him about my studies and practices based on *Hatha-yoga-pradīpikā*. "Now I am here and I want to practice *Yoga* eight hours a day," I proudly declared. After hearing this, Desikachar got up, picked up a piece of chalk, came to a chalk board and drew a rough map of India. Then, he pointed to an upper right corner of the map and said, "If you like, I can write a letter to a *Svāmi* in Rishikesh and you can go there to do your eight hours; however, here (he pointed to Madras on the map) we do 45 minutes!" I was disappointed to hear this but nevertheless made an appointment to see him next week.

HOW ŚRĪ TKV DESIKACHAR BECAME MY TEACHER

What follows is a highly personal account. I share this with you only to show how *Yoga* with proper guidance can help in some very troubling times. After meeting Desikachar for the first time, I had to fly to Delhi to meet my wife who was arriving from the US. After I met her, we went back to Madras and there, we had a very painful breakup. Soon after that, I went to Kotagiri, Nilgris. In Kotagiri I spent every single day walking among tea plantations and practicing self-inquiry according to what I'd learned from reading Krishnamurti and Ramana Maharshi. As the result of doing

what I thought was a spiritual practice, I came to realisation that there was nothing in me that I could call "I." That realisation produced pretty strong anxiety. I lost a lot of weight and was not eating at all. I felt so bad that I thought I needed medical treatment and was going to fly back to US to be hospitalised because I was so distraught. In addition to that, I was terribly embarrassed and thought that I could never show my face to Desikachar again. Look! I had told him that for many years I had wanted to study *Yoga*. I risked my life leaving the Soviet Union and going to the United States and now I had come all the way to Madras; then, after saying all of those things I disappeared and never showed up for my lesson! That was totally embarrassing! Fortunately for me, in Theosophical Society where I stayed, I met a young German doctor who told me his story, which was even worse than mine. He was totally burned out from his job as a medical doctor in Germany and had tried to commit suicide. He was in a hospital for a long time and now he had come to India to continue with his recovery. He encouraged me to call Desikachar. Finally, with great reservation and embarrassment, I called Sir and he agreed to see me.

I met him and told him what happened to me, how terribly I felt and that I experienced a lot of anxiety. Desikachar smiled and said, "I am happy that this happened to you! Now, you are ready to learn!" He was right! I was open and ready! Then, he arranged for me to see Prabhakar at KYM and to see him twice a week at his home. That is how my studies or rather my therapy began. I continued to lose weight. I was down from 100 kg to 75 kg and my anxiety levels were still high. All I wanted was to walk or talk. Desikachar was kind to listen to me attentively; then one day he said that we could talk or we could do some practice. Just after a few weeks of doing daily *Āsana* practice and seeing Desikachar and Prabhakar my mind began to calm down and gradually, in a few months, I got to a point that I felt fine enough to engage in a serious study of *Yoga*. In addition to having lessons with Prabhakar and Desikachar, I spent a lot of time readings books on *Yoga* at Adyar



library at Theosophical Society and volunteering at OM Morya Poor clinic in Adyar. It was very healing to bandage the wounds of poor people.

23 YEARS OF STUDIES WITH ŚRĪ TKV DESIKACHAR FROM 1979 UNTIL 2003

My first visit to Madras lasted eighteen months. Gradually, Sir gave me more and more of his valuable time, especially in the spring and summer, when the weather got hot and most of his western students went back home. At one point, Desikachar told me that he would continue teaching me only if I was going to become a *Yōga* teacher. Prior to that, I never thought of becoming a *Yōga* teacher. For me, it was always about my personal spiritual practice. I agreed and under his directions, I began teaching a few private students at KYM. It was very rewarding. I also used to sit in with him few evenings a week at KYM, where Desikachar saw people who sought help for various chronic health problems. It was a great learning experience for me to see how Desikachar was able to charm them and test them at the same time. Then, he would introduce a teacher to that new student/patient. He was able to not just come up with the right prescription but to match them with the most suitable teacher.

While waiting for my lesson with Sir, I often sat in a chair on the second floor verandah of his house. Quite often, I heard Desikachar and his father (Krishnamacharya) chanting together and that was a special treat. I felt I was being sent back to ancient times. Gradually, I became more aware that apart from *Āsana*, *Yōgasūtra* and other lessons, every single interaction with Desikachar was a learning experience. He always strived to make me aware of my own self-limiting *Samskāra*-s. For example, one I became impatient while waiting for a long time for my lesson with him. It was getting so hot! Finally, he came out and took one look at me and said, “Hey man, you look angry! I

do not think you are ready to study today. Come tomorrow!” Another time, I confronted him by saying, “Desikachar, you promised me to give me one more extra lesson per week.” Hearing this, Sir picked up a pair of scissors, put them in my hand, and at the same time he opened his mouth and stuck his tongue out! Then he said, “Cut!” I didn’t know what to do - cry or laugh. One day, he asked me to go with him to an area close to Mylapore temple to get some vegetables. At that time, he was driving a Maruti - a small Indian car. I tried to use this valuable time to ask him a few questions about *Yōgasūtra*. As I began asking him my question, he told me, “Yan push the cow.” I thought he was joking and said, “Please don’t joke Sir. I am very serious Sir.” Once again, he said, “Push the cow.” Then, I looked to my left side and found that the whole backside of a cow was inside our car, next to my face!

I often noticed that his presence was enough to make people around him be more productive and more joyful at the same time. In the beginning, I was a little bit afraid of Desikachar; however, gradually I realised that he always wanted the very best for me and while he could be strict, he was never mean. One time, he told me pointing to his watch, “I do not work by the clock.” That is why my lesson could last more than one hour or could last only twenty minutes.

On my first visit, my *Āsana* practice was taught to me by Prabhakar who was always careful and diligent in his teaching. He strictly followed Desikachar’s instructions on how and what to teach me. One day, Desikachar entered the room where Prabhakar was teaching and said, “Prabhakar, teach him *Ūrdhva Dhanūrāsana*!” Prabhakar protested, “But Sir, he is not ready. He is quite stiff and he has some shoulder stiffness.” Without replying to Prabhakar, Desikachar quickly told me loudly, “Yan get into *Ūrdhva Dhanūrāsana*!” Immediately, to the utter amazement of Prabhakar I just got into *Ūrdhva Dhanūrāsana* and was even able to stay there for a few minutes.



Desikachar did not separate *Yoga* teaching from his family life. He could play with his daughter while giving me a lesson and I was fortunate to observe how he interacted with his children. He was a great father. He was always keenly aware of what was going around him.

On my first visit to India, I was able to meet some of the great spiritual teachers like J. Krishnamurti, U.G. Krishnamurti, Nisargadatta Maharaj in Bombay, Shankaracharya, Pupul Jayakar and few others. Desikachar never pretended to be a saint or a *Guru*. He used to call himself, “A small master.” Nevertheless, for me he was the only true teacher that I had then and still have, even though he is no longer physically here with me. I was and still am impressed with the quality of Desikachar’s students from all over the world. Somehow, he was able to attract serious *Yoga* students and most importantly just good kind people. Desikachar frequently called himself “a postman” whose main mission was to deliver his father’s teachings. At the same time, he was deeply committed to promoting personal transformation and spiritual growth in his students. That was my impression.

This was also my experience. For example, when I would visit him in Madras he would always ask me to write down what I wanted to learn during that visit. Then, he would still teach me what he thought was good for me and most of the time it was nothing to do with what I had listed in my note. Each time I came, I never got what I wanted but instead I would get what I needed at that time! Desikachar was always able to see what I truly needed at any given time.

In all of my interactions with him, Desikachar never used any *Vikalpa* or imagination in what he taught. He wanted me to experience what I got or felt from my *Yoga* practice. He never told me things like, “Feel the *Prāṇa* going up your spine, etc.” Instead, he frequently told me, “Don’t bluff!”

LESSON WITH ŚRĪ T KRISHNAMACHARYA

In Summer of 1986, I graduated with BA in Sanskrit from University of California, Berkeley

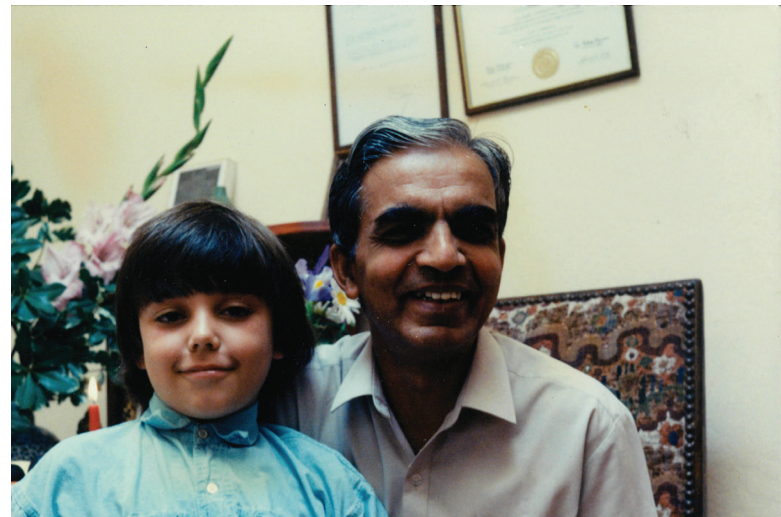


and soon after that, I flew to Madras to resume my studies with Desikachar. Prior to that, I had been aware of the presence of Śrī T Krishnamacharya, and I attended his presentations at KYM and one time in Mylapore, where he introduced his other student, BKS Iyengar. Also, I saw him numerous times at Desikachar's house while waiting for my lessons. One day, during that 1986 visit Desikachar told me jokingly, "Let us go and have a lesson with my father. Then you can say that you've studied with Krishnamacharya." It was actually Desikachar's own lesson and I just sat there to observe it. In the beginning, Desikachar prostrated a few times in front of Krishnamacharya. Then Krishnamacharya, while keeping his eyes half-closed began reciting some passages from *Brahma Sūtra* in *Saṁskṛta* and then explained their meaning. Desikachar was barely able to keep up with his father, writing in his notebook all that was being quoted in *Saṁskṛta* and explained to him. Later, after the lesson Desikachar and I returned to his room upstairs where I studied with him. Desikachar brought an original *Brahma Sūtra* text in *Saṁskṛta*

and we checked all quotes that Krishnamacharya had recited from his memory. There were no mistakes! It was 100% correct! Desikachar told me that his father had an immense memory and he was able to memorise thousands of pages from various texts including the whole *Rāmāyaṇa*. Now, let us go back to that lesson with Krishnamacharya that I observed. At the end of the lesson, Desikachar introduced me to his father and told me that I could ask him any questions. I asked him the same question that I previously asked Śaṅkarācārya and few other great spiritual teachers. It went something like this, "Is it possible for me in this life to find God or enlightenment?" Krishnamacharya remained silent for a minute, then he said in English, "When you feel it here (he pointed to his chest) you will feel completely satisfied; you don't want anything; it is so cool." "Is it cool like ice-cream?" asked Desikachar. "It is not ice-cream," replied Krishnamacharya! That was the end of my interview.

INDUS VALLEY ORIGINS OF A YOGA PRACTICE

While working on my BA in Sanskrit at UC Berkeley I studied and researched history and most recent developments in archeology of the Indus Valley civilization. I was doing my research under the guidance of Professor Dales. I discovered that some of the seals discovered in





Mohenjo Daro depicted *Yoga* postures. Desikachar encouraged me to proceed with my research and allowed me to use his father's photos. The results of my research were published in *Artibus Asiae Journal* in 1988. Currently, my paper is on the reading list of major universities and it has been quoted in many publications. I am grateful to Desikachar because he inspired and encouraged me to complete this academic endeavor.

VINIYOGA AMERICA

Desikachar always wanted his American students to organise and find a way to work together in order to present *Yoga* to people in the United States. That is why we created *Viniyoga America* as a non-profit organisation. Mrs. Mary Lou Skelton became its president and I was one of the five founding board members. I think that it was in summer of 1987 that Desikachar came to Colgate University where his most devoted students in North America met with him to do

some studies and to work on developing this new organisation - *Viniyoga America*. Unfortunately, with so many different personalities, some time later this organisation ceased to exist without accomplishing much. Desikachar wanted us to work together and gave hard time to most of us during that visit to Colgate University. Although, he was never directly tough on me, I felt a little bit lonely since he did not spend much time with me. As he was about to leave, he walked by me and softly whispered directly into my ear: "Love!"

HOSTING ŚRĪ TKV DESIKACHAR

In 1988, Desikachar conducted a seminar in San Rafael, California. He stayed in my house, which was just a short distance from the seminar location. It was a great honor to be his host. It was so much joy and pleasure to be with him every day. He had very simple tastes. He ate mostly fruits, nuts and some simple vegetable soup with butter. He even prepared special almond milk



with saffron for himself and me every morning. He also took walks with me and he walked quite fast. I remember one specific experience quite vividly. Desikachar always travelled lightly. He never had any checked luggage but just a small briefcase. Every place he visited, either had some of his clothes or they were purchased for him. That is why, one day I had to take him shopping to buy some clothes. I took him to a local department store. What happened next was a lot of fun. We were greeted by an elderly salesman and I explained to him that we needed to get a few shirts, a few slacks and a couple of sweaters for my friend. Desikachar went inside a changing room. During the next few minutes, the salesman and I were running around, and throwing various slacks, shirts and sweaters into that room while Desikachar was throwing some of them back to me. After about ten minutes, it was all done. Smiling, Desikachar emerged with a few items he had chosen. I was happy but also a little bit embarrassed because I thought we gave a hard time to that elderly salesman, who was running all over the place and was out of breath. I was wrong. That salesman shook Desikachar's hand, gave a big smile and said, "Sir I thoroughly enjoyed it." I have been able to observe these kinds of interactions on many occasions. Desikachar had a unique ability to make people around him

aware and happy at the same time. His enthusiasm and joy were infectious. Even today when I look at old photos of him standing next to his western students or his students from KYM, I see that they look so happy and standing, next to Sir.

HUMILITY

Desikachar never ceased to amaze me with his incredible ability to tackle all kinds of difficult situations and challenges in the most simple and efficient way. His presence commanded respect and he brought out the best in his students, associates and other people who came in contact with him. He had clear perception of what was going on and was able to communicate it in straightforward manner. I told him several times that he could have been the CEO of a major corporation because of his leadership and communication skills. However, he was also quite humble, and I was able to witness his humility on many occasions. One day, I came to have my lesson with Desikachar. I was quite disturbed because I had just had a fight with my rickshaw driver who had cheated me. I told Sir about what had happened to me and how angry I was. Desikachar smiled and told me that the previous day, one of his students had spat on him because he did not like how he was driving through an intersection. When that student realised on whom he had spat, he almost lost his mind and was sure that Desikachar would terminate him as a student. But, Desikachar did not even react with anger. I also remember how I took Desikachar to San Francisco International airport. He was going to fly back to Madras by Singapore Airlines. I have a tendency to be late and this time we were late and traffic was also very bad. We barely made it. I was extremely worried and upset with myself. Desikachar was sitting next to me with his briefcase on his lap. He was absolutely peaceful and relaxed. Moreover,



he never expressed any displeasure with me or said anything about us running out of time.

INTEGRITY

In my life, I've observed that famous people like politicians, actors and even *Yōga* teachers become easily corrupted by money and power. I remember that when I first began studying with Desikachar, I was told that he accepted donations but did not demand a specific fee. I did not know what an appropriate donation would be. One day I asked him, "Sir how much should I pay you for my lessons?" "If you are millionaire, pay me a million, if you are poor, pay me nothing," he replied. I ended up paying him 25 rupees per lesson because I did not have much money at that time. I had no idea how much other students paid him. I do not believe that the quality of his teaching was influenced in any way by how much money he was paid. Desikachar was not an austere monk who took up a vow of poverty. He told me one time that he has been taken good care of by his students. He enjoyed good fruits, comfortable places to stay and sensible travel arrangements. However, he was very clear on what was the appropriate use of money. He had numerous

opportunities to become very rich. However, Desikachar never looked at his teaching as a business and instead, mostly focused on one to one teaching and charitable work. In my life, I have witnessed that power often corrupts people, even more than money. These days, we are learning of many instances of all kinds of abuse by powerful people including some famous *Yōga* teachers. In my personal experience

and in my observation of how he treated other people, I have never seen Desikachar being mean or abusive in any way. Yes, he could be strict, and he would often challenge me, but he was never mean. The longer I knew him, the more I realised how kind he was. He had a lot of power, but he used it only to challenge his students and bring out the best in them, and to encourage them to change. I also witnessed that on a few occasions he gave a hard time to some of his old students. He acted out of kindness because he cared deeply for each of his students. He did not care for people with big egos.

COMPASSION

I would like to add one more quality to Desikachar's humility and integrity – his compassion. It was not obvious to me at first. Initially, I had an impression that Desikachar was quite strict and aloof. I remember how one time he said, "The best help is not to help." This was said about one person who did not show up for her appointment. Gradually, as I got to know him, I recognised that Sir cared deeply about his family, his students, all KYM visitors and other people

who came into his life. I remember that during my lessons with him, one of his children could pop in and Desikachar would listen and interact with them. Those interactions did not diminish his teaching but actually enhanced it because it was also “*Yōga*.” *Yōga* of family relations. In 1991, I came to see Desikachar with two of my students for a brief visit. At that time, I was under a lot of stress. He showed me so much kindness and care during that visit. He drove me around, took me out to Woodlands for dinner and even drove me to the airport when I was leaving. One day, he had to attend a wedding of his relative. He left me sitting in his car and told me, “I’ll go to show my face, do my “*Vīṇyāsa*” and will be back in twenty minutes.” He did get back in twenty minutes. I’d witnessed on many occasions that children were naturally drawn to him and he was great with them. During our visit in 2002, my daughter Natasha was only 5 years old. Sir taught her *Laghunyāsa*, and just after two lessons, she was able to memorise it and recite it to a group of teachers at KYM.

APPLICATION OF *YOGA* IN THE REAL WORLD

Desikachar told me on many occasions that the real test of our *Yōga* practice and learning is how we apply it to our relationships, our work and all other aspects of our life. In 1992, I moved to Seattle and I was hired as a job developer at a non-profit agency that served refugees. My job was to find jobs and place refugees from Eastern Europe and South-east Asia with various local employers. In the beginning, I found it to be impossible because when I found a job for a refugee, either he/she did not like that job, or a prospective employer did not like him/her. Then, I took a few days off to reflect on how I could succeed and suddenly, I had an insight, “I needed to match jobs to individuals, the same way as I adapt *Āsana* practice to each individual student.” Soon after that I created a generic job application that had very specific questions like,

“What shift can you work?, Can you drive on a freeway?, What jobs would you not do?” and so on. In addition, I visited many local employers in order to understand their needs. That is why, during my second month at that agency, I was able to place twenty-two refugees with most suitable employers. As a result of my work, I was promoted to a supervisor position so I could train other job developers to perform better.

PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION

To me, the most important quality of a *Yōga* teacher is his/her ability to understand his/her student and to promote deep spiritual transformation. In other words, a *Yōga* teacher should be able to help his students to recognise and overcome deep-rooted *Samskāra-s* and to move towards *Yōga* state as it defined in *Yōgasūtra* I-2.

From the very beginning, that was Sir’s work with me. He was not afraid to engage in a deeply personal relationship. It is because of his humility, integrity and compassion, that there were never any negative “side effects” that often happen in friendships or teacher-student relationships. Desikachar had a unique ability to be a teacher and a friend at the same time. He always challenged me to learn, to question and to be aware. Some of his students called him “Mr. *Parīṇāma*” because he was never interested in just giving “information” but in the true transformation of his student. It is because of his unique observation skills that he was able to see where his student was. He would cancel my lesson if he saw that I was bored or not interested. I always got from each lesson with him as much as I was willing to put in. My lessons with him are imprinted in my memory forever. He would sit on the other side of table facing me directly. There was nothing on the table except paper, pencils and a glass of water. He liked to draw on a paper as he talked. At the end of each lesson, he would walk me outside and warmly wish me good bye. When I got back to the US, he would write to me once in a while. His letters were brief but incredibly meaningful. Whenever



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Dear Yan Dhyansky

Hearty congratulations on the brilliant article about the Yoga practice in the ancient Indian civilisation. It is a great event for you and to all of us.

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I got a letter from him, I would not open it for a few days, but just carry it with me and look at it before finally opening and reading it. It was such a treat. The biggest regret of my life is that I've not finished my studies with him. The last time I saw Desikachar was for a very brief time while he was waiting for a flight in Vancouver, Canada. I thought that he would live for a very long time

and I would be able to come back to complete my study of *Yogasūtra* and to improve my personal practice. I had no idea that he was ill. I always thought that I would die before him because of my medical history. I even asked him on one occasion if he could perform some kind of ritual and dispose my ashes after my death, if my wife brought them to India. With a smile and a sparkle

in his eye he said, “Don’t worry we’ll throw them in the ocean. In the meantime, go back home and do some good work.”

Here, I am able to share only a few of my experiences with Śrī Desikachar. There were so many more. One of them stands out. In the Spring of 1992, I was living and teaching *Yōga* in Marin County, California. It was a time in my life when I needed desperately to move to another city/state. I called Desikachar and related to him what was going on with me. Then I asked him, “Sir, please advise me where I should move?” “Seattle!” he replied. There was not even a second’s pause before he answered. He responded immediately. Then I asked again, “How about Atlanta? That is

another possibility.” “No, that is not my idea. Go to Seattle,” he replied. I did follow his direction. I’ve been living here in Seattle for the last 28 years. My daughter was born here, and many good things happened here. It was the right place for me to move and to settle here.

I remember that when I saw Desikachar in 2002 in Madras, I asked him if he missed his father. To this, he replied, “When my father was alive, I was not always with him. Now after his death he is always with me.” That is what I am trying to cultivate in myself by paying attention and going deep inside to hear my teacher’s voice. I do hear his voice or at least what he frequently used to tell me, “Don’t bluff and do good to people.”