

An interview with dr. Dejan Dinevski Dayalpuri, originally published at the main Slovenian news portal Siol.net on 1st of August 2015

(http://www.siol.net/trendi/lepota_in_zdravje/aktualno/2015/07/joga_v_vsakdanjem_zivljenju.aspx,

Interviewed by: Neza Mrevlje, photo: Ana Kovac)

A belief that others are worse than we are or that they threaten us is an inner illusion which creates tension within ourselves and in our relationships.



Dejan Dinevski, a teacher of yoga and meditation, stresses that both disciplines have deep benefits for the individual and for his/her quality of life if practiced regularly.

Dr. Dejan Dinevski has been practicing as well as teaching yoga for the past 25 years. He has been sharing his knowledge on all continents, including in India, at yoga seminars guided by Swami Maheshwarananda, his master from whom he has acquired his knowledge. He is a professor at the University in Maribor, Slovenia where he lectures on the subject of Yoga in Sports in the sports training program.

As president of Yoga in Daily Life (YIDL) Maribor center, which he co-founded in 1990, he works to endorse the potential of yoga and meditation for developing psychophysical abilities, strengthening mental stability and concentration, and increasing quality of life. With his yoga and meditation practice he unites the spiritual level of living but doesn't talk much about it. For him describing inner experiences has no practical benefit for others. He compares it with trying to describe the taste of butter to someone who has never tasted it.

He emphasizes that yoga is not meant to be medical or psychological therapy, but rather an excellent prevention against chronic illnesses and negative influences of stress, as well as psychological support in different life situations. Together with his colleagues from eleven Slovenian YIDL centers, he wants to share knowledge about yoga with citizens of Slovenia. Besides regular non-profit classes, Slovenian YIDL centers organize free yoga programs in parks, old people's homes, prisons, schools, and other community settings.

How did yoga persuade you to start practicing regularly?

I have been interested in yoga since I was in grammar school. This was in the 1980's when there was not much literature or other information available. Therefore I searched and learned from available books, until I met Indian master Swami Maheshwarananda who finally convinced me of the value and meaning of yoga in human life.

We know of various kinds of yoga and its derivatives. Lately we can encounter yoga performed naked, and there is also popular yoga performed at 37 degrees, and acroyoga, etc. Are these mainly a product of the Western world?

We know about many such varieties which are mostly the product of different marketing approaches. Yoga has become a huge business in the last 20 years, especially in the United States. In serious yoga schools and systems where the expertise of yoga teachers is built over several years, the authentic yoga is taught.

What do you mean by saying authentic yoga? Is it not beneficial and beyond the commercial interest that practices have also changed due to time and environment, perhaps with some new findings and needs?

I agree with you. It is good that things develop and adapt to the environment, culture and modern way of life. Yoga is very effectively interlaced with other techniques of preserving vitality as well as physical and psychic health nowadays. But authentic yoga is that which preserves basic, ancient and proven principles although its practices are changing organically. Such yoga influences our body and spirit in a holistic way. In the cases mentioned in your question the integrity of yoga is spoiled which is well noticed in its effects. The name of yoga is mostly used for marketing.

How is yoga adapted to the Western market?

Yoga is adjusted in a way to be interesting for the Westerns. Some genuine elements of yoga are occasionally excluded, mostly meditation, and physical poses are emphasized. Sometimes athletic elements are added in order to make exercises more dynamic. Such variations of yoga are more successful in the market. On the other hand the authentic yoga brings a wider, holistic message, it has the spiritual dimension and is interlaced with certain elements of Indian culture and partly religion. Yoga is not directly a part of Hinduism which is an important emphasis that I learned at this year's world conference in India, on the occasion of International Yoga Day (21st June) where the Indian Prime Minister himself gave the plenary lecture.

You have mentioned U.N. International Yoga Day on the 21st June which was proposed by Indian Prime Minister Modi. His initiative gained strong support, adopted by 175 members. But there is a question of political background of the Indian Prime Minister who is a member of the right-wing nationalistic Hindu movement, the RSS organization, which contradicts yogic principles.

I do not know the politics of N. Modi well enough to estimate if he used International Yoga Day for his political purposes. Regarding that he clearly separated yoga from religion so I see no misuse. Even contrary: during this event I noticed many positive responses of Muslim

residents in the Indian media. In general I am happy that so many countries support the resolution of the United Nations. This is a nice indicator of the universality of yoga.

We have talked about how yoga is adapted to our cultural environment in the West, to our value system. The physical appearance is highly stressed and therefore the aim to shape the body to be strong, vital, young and flexible. But yoga has other contents and meanings, too.

In the West we are mainly interested in the practical value of yoga; that is for sure. The first is that our body becomes more flexible, vital and nicely shaped. Another basic and easily reachable achievement in yoga is relaxation. A deep relaxation is a surprising discovery for some people. A relaxation in yoga is then deepened with pranayama, breathing techniques with which our psychophysical energy is felt and harmonized. Meditation is an upgrade of physical and breathing techniques. The scope of meditation exceeds our body as well as energy and touches the deep dimensions of the mind and consciousness. We search for absolute inner peace and freedom in meditation. Such an experience has a wider spiritual aspect which in turn results in a change of the person and of the life in general.

Can meditation actually lead to changes in the personality?

A wide meta-research done by Dr. Bogart G. and published in a prestigious American scientific psychotherapeutic magazine, finds that meditation is a multidimensional phenomenon which has immense benefits. The author says that meditation is correlated with the physical relaxation which releases stress and anxiety, and has an impact on physical symptoms. The article ends with an important conclusion that meditation can have a great impact on the deep personal transformation that is the aim of psychotherapy.

What are your own personal experiences with meditation?

On the basis of my own observations I can only agree with the above. Some long-term practitioners of yoga and meditation experience significant changes in their personality. One of our first yoga students, a peer of mine, who had huge learning issues, has tremendously improved her ability to study and is just now finishing her medical studies. As a professor on the Faculty of Medicine I have been observing and admiring her hard efforts while she has been successfully studying with younger colleagues almost half her age for the past 6 years.

You are describing meditation as a method for observation of space of the consciousness

...

The basic foundation for meditation is relaxation. Afterwards you withdraw from the outer world to the inner impressions of the senses and then continue to the observation of the state of your being. This starts from the body and continues to the level of mental perception and observation of energy and breath.

The next step in meditation is observation of the mind as an instrument of our consciousness. Here a question arises: what is consciousness by itself?

Science doesn't have an answer to that question. The philosophers even prefer to avoid mentioning it. In The International Dictionary of Psychology, the psychologist Stuart Sutherland says that consciousness is a fascinating phenomenon which is impossible to define as we can't tell what it actually is, how it works and why it develops. But without any doubt every individual is familiar with his or her own consciousness and in meditation we

learn how to observe its “space.” That space is of course just an abstraction and our own mind is one part of it. Actually a very small number of people know how their own mind works.



What do you mean specifically by saying that most people don't know how their own mind works?

In his book *Don't Believe Everything You Think*, Thomas Kida describes the 6 most common mistakes in our thinking process of which we are mostly not aware. The research work of Daniel Kahneman, the Nobel Prize Winner in Economic Sciences, has shown that the mind works in two ways which are described as two systems – the intuitive and the rational. While we think that our decisions and acts are rational we are mostly driven by our Intuitive Mind, which can produce extraordinary and very creative solutions. But sometimes, especially when we feel unhappy or hurt, the Intuitive Mind can make huge, even absurd mistakes of which we are not even aware.

Also, product marketing and politics systematically appeal to our Intuitive Mind because it is so easily seduced by our emotions. But let's return back to Yoga – the important thing in meditation is that we learn step by step the operation of the mind by its observation. In doing that we learn how to direct the mind and calm it down.

You say that we are more than just our mind.

Recently I read a book, *How to Create a Mind* by Ray Kurzweil, who brilliantly describes the basic algorithm of the prefrontal cortex in mammals, primates and humans. The author claims that the functioning of the mind is directly caused by the operation of this part of the cerebral cortex. My opinion is that we cannot really know ourselves if we stay only on the level of the mind. We need to go beyond that, to the level of consciousness, where the mind is nothing more than just one of the instruments. In the meditative space of consciousness we are able to observe our mind, our senses and our emotions. The mind is not able to be present in this actual moment because it is always analysing the past or planning the future,

when the only thing that we really have is the present. The mind is a great servant but a weak master.

I guess it would be wrong to say that meditation is the sum of the moments without thoughts?

Moments without thoughts are part of meditation but we can't deliberately stop the thinking process. Doing that would create a great tension which would be similar to damming the river. In the course of time the dam will overflow. A thought that we shouldn't think about anything is already a thought by itself. In meditation we are directing our mind in a very subtle way. The meditation leads to the spontaneous thought-less moments or even to moments without a specific conscious content, which is an incredible and overwhelming experience.

How can the practice of yoga help us with facing our everyday problems?

While practicing yoga in our daily life we gradually learn how to master our day-to-day problems. But yoga by itself doesn't give miraculous and quick solutions.

Sometimes it can be very helpful to use certain techniques for directing the mind which we learn by practicing meditation, or in other cases we can use positive affirmations and techniques for raising our self-image. Some use a more spiritual approach, for example surrendering the situation to the "force majeure" (superior force, the universe or god – depends on the person's perception). In yoga we also have a very powerful technique called '*sankalpa*' – which actually means "seed for a thought." In a state of deep relaxation we plant this seed deep into our consciousness and then we cultivate it through meditation until we attain our goal. At the same time it is important not to allow others to impose their own thoughts on us.

Is yoga a way of life?

For those who are dedicated to the steady yogic practice yoga represents a way of life, because it influences the course of your day, your thoughts, actions and relationships.

Is acceptance also one of its principles?

In addition to nonviolence, the basic principles of yoga are open-heartedness and tolerance. Acceptance of differences, different religions and cultures is the fundamental social principle which has the potential to change our collective coexistence. If individuals would develop tolerance toward others, other cultures and beliefs, our society would significantly change. As Gandhi said: "Be the change you want to see." But nevertheless, it is crucial to also accept yourself as you are.

How do you define ego?

Ego is a term, in a way similar to the consciousness, but slightly easier to define. In my opinion the ego, awareness of being an individual, is essential for our life and survival. By practicing yoga we try to overcome the negative aspects of ego like egoism and egocentrism - which encourage conflicts and wars. A belief that others are worse than we are or that they threaten us is an inner illusion which creates tension within ourselves and in our relationships.

Are there any asanas – yogic exercises – that calm down the ego like, for example, “the warrior”?

“The warrior” is an example of an exercise for raising self-confidence or positive self-image but not in the sense of feeling superior. Calming down the negative aspects of ego is possible only by transforming our personality and as I previously mentioned, that can be realized through meditation.

Is working with energy also an important part of yogic practice?

Yoga treats the energy in the body in a very subtle way. The flow of energy is symbolically shown in the form of the energy centers or chakras. In the practice of yoga we work with the chakras through different meditation techniques. Because it's not easy to describe the energy, yoga symbolically explains energy through the form of different chakras. As a matter of fact right at this time you can see the installation of eight main chakras in the Mozirje Botanical Garden, Slovenia.