

Cornerstones of Desikachar's teaching*

* These eight points are based on a talk which Martyn Neal gave at the TSYP/aYs joint event in 2021. We have used Martyn's talk as a starting point on which we have elaborated, but the points are not a verbatim account of what he said.

Martyn makes an important point: 'Since Desikachar worked on a one-to-one basis, no one student can honestly say "this is the teaching". However, I offered my vision of what I see as the prevailing tendencies.'

1 Respect

Mutual respect between the teacher and the student is fundamental. This approach to Yoga puts the human being (not the Yoga practice) at the centre. For the teacher, the individual student's needs are central, and Yoga techniques are in the service of that. This respect will arise naturally in a good teacher who has been well trained.

2 Observation

Teachers need to observe and listen closely to their students. It is particularly important to notice what is *behind* what is being said. If we look and listen with open hearts, we will find the appropriate techniques for someone's needs.

3 *Viniyoga* (*Yoga Sūtra* 3.6)

This is the art of creating tailor-made practices for our students, taking into account as many factors about their circumstances and temperaments as possible. It means being sensitive to nuance and difference and adjusting the tools of Yoga accordingly, whether in a group class or a one to one session.

4 Personal practice for teachers

Individual classes were a core part of Desikachar's teaching, and continue to play a key role in this way of teaching and learning Yoga. In order to empathise fully and understand the difficulties which might arise on the Yoga path, the teacher needs to be on the same journey as the student. *This means that a personal practice guided by their own teacher is as important for all teachers as it is for their students.*

5 *Prānāyāma*/conscious breathing

Understanding the importance of the breath in all we do is a vital component of the Yoga practice, both breath in *āsana* and seated *prānāyāma* practice. Conscious use of the breath is very specific to Desikachar's teaching. How we breathe affects how we are in the world. The breath brings the practice to life and can change the way we see everything.

6 *Bhāvana*

Bhāvana is a powerful tool which can be very supportive, and also transformational. Focusing on a word, image or bodily sensation opens up possibilities which can act as a balm to our souls, make all the difference to our day and, over time, transform us. It is a hugely rich area to be tapped and the only limit is our imaginations.

7 Chanting/use of sound

Chanting and the use of sound can focus the mind like no other practice, hence its huge value as a Yoga tool. With chanting it is immediately apparent if the mind goes elsewhere because we can hear our mistakes. Desikachar said that chanting nourishes the soul.

8 *Yoga Sūtra* study

The *Yoga Sūtra* of Patanjali is a core Yoga text which describes the human condition and the possibilities for our transformation. We start with getting to know the text, and then begin to see how relevant it is to our everyday lives. As we open up to its depths, we see that the *Yoga Sūtra* is to be both studied and lived.