

Interview of Vijaya Manja (January 2017)

An invitation for a change

Dr. Vijaya Manja has his own yogagurukula in a small village in coastal Karnataka, South India. In there the students will experience all the aspects of spirituality from the familiar asana practice to philosophy, chanting and japa and other spiritual rituals and lifestyle. His style of teaching and the atmosphere makes it possible for many students to let go and allow deeper changes totake place. How is it to study with Vijaya?



You run your own Yogagurukula in South India. Can you tell us more about what gurukula is and about the life style there.

Gurukula is a traditional vedic spiritual education system, it means the home of a teacher or a guru. In the ancient times the young students were sent to study with a guru for many years. Studying spirituality in a sattvic and quiet atmosphere compared to a busy city environment makes a big difference. Especially in the beginning it is not possible to dive deep into practices in the midst of crowds. Subtle and secret spiritual matters takes time and a proper atmosphere to reach the student's mind and heart. In a gurukula this supportive pure atmosphere is present and that effects tremendously and is very transformative. Later when a practitioner has a steady mind adjusting is easier and the place makes less difference. A practitioner learns to share and live in karma yogic way. This means selfless actions and living a simple life with less attachments.

This sounds a bit challenging comparing to how we live our lives at the moment.

If a practitioner has experiences of worldly objects not fulfilling the desires and if he is ready to change , then it is not a challenge, it is a way of life. One has to let go of something to gain something. In Bhagavad Gita Krishna talks about karma yoga, the essence of that is sacrifice called *yajña*. Sacrifice is not a negative thing, it is the letting go of miness that feels difficult, but only then something greater can be achieved and experienced. The word *yajña* means also a fire ceremony, but it symbolizes the whole creation. It is for the upliftment of the individual and the society both. It is not me, it is we. That “we” is the very essence of *yajña*. We is always stronger than me. In the end we are alone, but only in the end the aloneness happen. To reach that we need “we”. Nowadays the world is based on individualism, this “we” is disappearing and the very concept of *yajña* is disappearing with it.

This *yajña* concept is the base of the creation and the very base of us human beings. It is the matter of the existence. Nowadays we are far away from our center, but the nature is in *yajña* at all times. The river flows and gives water to others. The tree will bear a fruit, for others. We are taking a lot from the nature, but we

ready

back.



are not
to give
anything

Greediness, desires and attachments rule the world. This is not our true nature. We took birth with the *yajña* concept and by being aware of it and practicing it we have a chance to go towards to our real nature. *Yajña* is not subject to knowledge, it is a subject to action. It doesn't help that we know about sacrifice, we actually have to act on it and let it transform us. When we allow the sacrifice to happen all our doubts will vanish. All our practices, philosophy and actions should end up in the *yajña*, otherwise it is a waste.

In our gurukula we have an early morning (ashtanga)asana class and later philosophy and chanting class. My wife and my mother are cooking the meals and we all eat together with the students. I do my own practices (japa and/or puja in a temple) in the morning and in the evenings. My wife Bhvaya also helps students in their daily matters and is a beautiful example of the selfless way of working. Sometimes we have special courses on yoga, philosophy and sanskrit, but usually the teaching happens continuously and students will come and go adjusting to the teaching. No previous experience is needed, just an open mind and a will to sincerely learn yoga.

How is it to be a spiritual guide, a guru to someone?

I don't call myself a guru, I am just a practitioner. If I start feeling and behaving like a guru the students will leave. It is a student's own choice to call me that, to accept the studentness, *sishya vritti*. In the ancient times the students stayed long time continuously in a gurukula and sincerely studied the theory and practiced closely to a guru. The important qualities that a student needs got ripened within time. Qualities such as discrimination ability, dispassion towards the material objects, control of body and mind and a strong desire for liberation were necessary then and are also necessary now in understanding the knowledge. Student's abilities followed by faith, patience and discipline are the very core of the gurukula system and in learning yoga. These will not happen naturally. Only with a guru these qualities will take place in a practitioner.

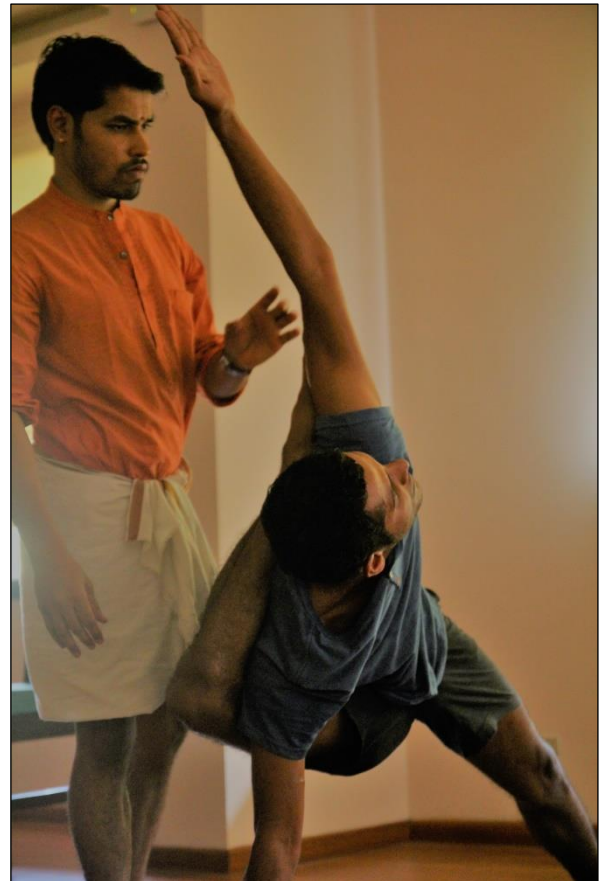
The examination of a guru is like a strong wind, which will be separating the real seeds from impurities by blowing away all the half seeds and unwanted material which will not grow properly. Then only the real and heavy seeds remain and when the guru waters them with the showers of knowledge, compassion and love they will grow beautifully and strong carrying on the real tradition. The students were also observing the guru in deep and subtle ways. Guru's behaviour, practices, activities and relationships were closely watched and that itself was the big part of the teaching. Students learned to live together and support each other. Everyone shared the pains and pleasures. This atmosphere was created by the guru and in this way learning and purification were happening very fast and success on a path was sure to happen. The relationship of a guru and a student is very important in the spiritual path, it is greater and purer than any other relationship. The faith is the most important quality in this relationship. A guru is not only giving the knowledge, but through his teaching he can choose to share and pass on his energy as well.

Is this still possible in today's world?

Nowadays the exactly same may not be possible, back then the gurus and disciples were very intense and high practitioners. Practical qualities that a guru or acharya needs are study, teaching and practice. A guru should be very busy every day of collecting and studying the essence of different *shastras*. What he has learnt he should teach to his students and guide them to practice it in every possible way. The most important thing, which is sad to say often lacking in the teachers, is to really practice himself what he has learnt. To be the teaching. We should lower the intensity little bit into today's level, but the essence of the gurukula system and the path of yoga leading to samadhi is still there. It is rare to find students who would spend years studying in a traditional way.

How important role asana practice has in a spiritual path?

Very important. Without an understanding of a body one can not control mind. After gaining steadiness of the body mind system there is joy and a release of the effort and concentrating on to the endless. Concentrating to the endless means concentrating our mind to the Self, the Spirit, trying to experience our true being, that which is beyond our senses. Through the meditative





practices we can feel more within, we become more withdrawn and observe less our body and through our senses. Concentrating on the breath makes the journey faster. After sometime even breaths become too external and concentration goes deeper, more subtle and towards mind and beyond. Then we concentrate towards the Infinity, our Spirit. More experienced practitioners can get into the meditative flow of breath and movement very fast. Then asana, breathing, and mind all becomes into the same flow. There is no differentiation between the body and the observer. Senses get disconnected and a practitioner goes into meditation although movement continues. Then a practitioner is a witness. Asana practice becomes yagna, a sacred divine ritual and a play.

You will visit Finland again next May and this will be your fourth visit. What do you think of our country and finnish yoga practitioners?

Finland is very beautiful country with fresh air and lots of pure nature. There are less people and especially sauna I really like. Finnish language sounds beautiful and it has some similarities with

sanskrit. I have noticed that many finns learn to chant and pronounce correctly easily. If looking the practitioners from the Self path view, there are no differencies, all are one and same Spirit, but the same practices are not suitable for everyone. Different practitioners need different kinds of practices to develop on a path and when a practitioner has matured enough suitable practices are important addition. I hve noticed many finns are good practitioners, they are ready for the philosophy and can apply theory into practice well. They follow instructions and practices given to them, that I like.

Vijaya Manja will visit Finland 3-15th of May 2017 and Australia in June. More info: www.yogagurukula.in yogagurukula at gmail.com

