Ammaji’s thoughtful answers for the Kaivalyadhama Interview for the Souvenir of the 7th International Conference – Yoga for the Youth: Classical and Contemporary perspectives. Released on the 27th December 2012 at Kaivalyadhama Lonavla.

1. **There are increasing incidences of stress / depression / aggression / divorces / superficial lifestyles in the youth. What are your views on Yoga as a remedy for this pandemic?**

   Yoga is not a remedy. Yoga is not a pill. Yoga is a life style. This “Yoga way of life” must be cultivated carefully by a wise teacher in the mind of a devoted student. If this is understood, and the youth are inspired – instructed in this “Yogic Art of Living” the asuric demons which infest the modern, urban, commercial, ego – centered life style will be destroyed and the attendants of such demonic impulses, stress, depression – aggression will vanish.

2. **Do you think that it is correct for us to modify certain practices to make it easier for the younger generation to understand Yoga?**

   There is no need to “modify” any Yogic practice. All Yoga practices – attitudes – techniques – mind sets - evolve naturally from the basic elementary rough ideas and grow slowly in a gradually refined manner through awareness and practice into the more subtle levels. In this Parampara the concept is called: Sapurna, Purna, and Paripurna or incomplete, complete and perfect. There is a power released at each level. Just as a sculptor begins with a crude stone and day by day, chisels the stone into a refined shape, so also the practices begin at a crude level and by daily work, are sculpted into a refined ethereal embodiment of the deity.

3. **What is your opinion on teaching of Dharana and Dhyana to teenagers?**

   Dharma, Dharana and Dhyana have a common root which means integrity, stability, harmony, i.e., The cultivation of stability of body, mind and emotions can be inculcated even at the kindergarten level. The basis of all Dharana and Dhyana is Dharma: Dharma is that which produces stability, harmony and integrity at every level. If one fulfills one’s Dharma, Dharana becomes the natural state of consciousness. I prefer to use the word Dharana instead of Dhyana, by the way, for the English word “Meditation”. Dharana is the sixth step of Ashtanga Yoga. It means basically to “hold fast to one point”. Patanjali’s definition of Dharana is “confining the mind to one place”. This implies binding the mind to a concept, idea, image, sound etc like tying a bull to a post to limit its movement. Dharana is an attempt to limit the movement of the mind. This can be taught in simple ways even to children. Dhyana is the seventh step of Yoga Sadhana. Dhyana implies a perfection in Dharana. Dhyana “occurs” when Dharana is perfected. Dharana grows out of Dharma, doing what is right. Dhyana thus cannot be “taught”. A seed can be planted. The plant can be cultivated, watched, watered, cared for… but one cannot force the plant to produce a flower. The cultivation of the ground and planting of the seed is Dharma. The care of the plant is Dharana. The production of the flower is Dhyana. Teenagers can be taught to “limit the movements” of their minds, (concentration) in many ways, through Mantra, Japa, classical music, Bhajana, Asana, Pranayama, dance even sports and intelligent study… students should be made aware that all these activities “train their brains” Dharana is the ultimate method of “training the brain”.

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4. **What would be your advice to yoga teachers if they are asked to take an hour and a half workshop on yoga in a regular college/university? What should be the content of their session?**

Such short sessions could be beneficial in explaining the concept of Yoga in a wholistic sense. The session should concentrate on helping the students understand the vastness of Yogic science as a life style, inspiring college students to delve deeply into Yogic studies. The session should be informational and inspirational.

5. **What is your opinion about setting up basic minimum standards for training courses in yoga? What would be principles which should govern the basic minimum standards, given the diversity of schools?**

There should be basic minimum standards for training in Yoga. The principles should be the basic concepts of the *Yoga Sutras*, the *Bhagavad-Gita* and the major *Upanishads*. A consensus of principles as compiled by a gathering together of representatives of the twelve major Yoga Parampara of India can also be compiled with the Acharyas of each tradition offering “Eight” (Ashta) basic concepts which define their lineage. This work has already been attempted by Moraji Desai National Institute of Yoga and CCRYN in New Delhi and the Indian Yoga Association.

6. **How important are the concrete traditional practices such as yama niyama asana, pranayamas etc.? In ones pursuit in yoga,(development/growth/self realisation) can one do away with these practices and derive results only with intellectual means?**

This question is like asking “How important is the foundation of a building? Can a building stand without a foundation? Should one build one’s house on shifting sands? “Tens of thousands of Rishis have insisted there can be no spiritual advancement without the purity and discipline of a life style based on *Yama and Niyama*. Can 10,000 Rishis be wrong?

7. **How do you think we can make Yoga popular amongst our youth without losing its traditional basis?**

I don’t think we must make “Yoga popular!” Are we running for elections? Have we become Yoga politicians who need desperately huge numbers of votes to survive. We can take a horse to water, but can we make it drink! I think first one must develop one’s own Sadhana by disciplined practice. If then, people appear who wish to be taught, then one should teach. It is best to teach by example, not to preach with words. Living good clean lives, being of service to family, community, nation, practicing what we preach, walking our talk – we will inspire others wherever our shadow falls. It is the ego which thinks it must “make Yoga popular”. Establish a small school. Teach in an inspired way with sincerity and devotion. Why do we need “Mega Ashrams and Mega Yoga Institutions?” Are large numbers of followers a symbol of spiritual success or validity? Yogis are not missionaries. Yogis are exemplars. Without stirring from their caves they uplift the world consciousness. Even in our own times we have the example of Ramana Maharishi who never set foot outside of Arunachala from the age of 16. Yet, the world beat a path to his door!

8. **Any other thoughts you wish to share on the conference theme.**

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All that being said, I can only draw on my own experience of 45 years. I have taught Yoga to tens of thousands of children and youth since 1975. Since I loved the children and loved Yoga, I found my own way to attract them to a “higher life”. For me I used Dance, Music, Drama, Games and Fun as my teaching style and to attract young minds to Yoga concepts. Yoga for my students was just plain good, clean fun! When they were young so many tools were there: Competitions, Camps, Drama, Cultural programmes, Games, Dance, Speeches, Essays etc., Each good teacher must explain and it express his life or creativity in his teaching style. In expressing the “Joy of Yoga” one naturally attracts the youth. Above all, the Yoga life must be a happy, joyful, cheerful, fun type of life – not in a frivolous sense, but in the real sense of Anandam. Our Guru Swami Gitananda said: (A swami must always have the word “Anandam” attached to his name. If you meet a Swami who does not have a smile on his lips, a twinkle in his eye and a laugh in his heart, run away as fast as you can! He is not a Swami! He’s a fake!) Seek your bliss and allow others to also do so! Yoga is a tried and true method to create a happy, fulfilling life.

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