

A Fresh Perspective: Yoga with Diane Long

We are all beginners.

What if we practiced *uttanasana* from the perspective that we are not “folding” or “hinging” from our hips but lengthening our spine? What if your squat was vertical and not horizontal? And how would you respond if you were given the instructions to separate your feet from your thighs and allow your heels to rest as your ankles find the ground? Yoga with Diane Long challenges everything we think we know about practicing Yoga and allows us to revisit that simple place of not knowing; not controlling but feeling.

Practicing yoga in this way demands our attention. We note small movements and nuances. We move incrementally to allow one part of our body to sing to another. There is no method involved but a creativity that grows from within;

Yoga practice is like music and the song of the body wants to sing. We just have to create the right conditions. (Diane Long)

With this Yoga we are asked not to question with our head but allow our body to show us the way. Usually, we see a pose and we analyse how to get into it. We note how far apart the feet are, the position of the arms or the tilt of the head. Our intellect attempts to find answers to questions that we haven't even been asked.

This yoga leads us to a place where we can engage and be part of the movement that is life. We think we have to dance but there is already a dance going on. We just have to participate. The work is to participate' (Diane Long)

What does this mean when it comes to our practice? I spent many years with Diane's Student, Sophy Hoare and in my time with her, Sophy would gently instruct me to “do less”. When we are trying to impress either our teacher, our students, ourselves or others, we are in our head; striving to do more. When we are in our body, listening to muscles articulate and sending attention to those parts of us that we never thought we could feel, we rest in the awareness of Now.

Yoga is about cultivating a state of Being (Diane Long)

We can label it as meditation but then we are “doing” something again. Labelling and/or compartmentalising only keeps us in our head. This Yoga teaches us to let go of what we think we know and find a way of moving that brings us back to the beginning: our spine.

In her book, *Awakening the Spine*, Vanda Scaravelli begins by informing us a “revolution has to take place”. This revolution demands we rethink the way we practice yoga. This “new teaching” makes us not just tune into our body and its relationship with the earth and gravity but surrender to it.

This revolution challenges all we think we know and all that we habitually strive for. Doing less is the opposite to what we are usually taught but the truth is simple: doing less allows us rest. Our joints, bones and muscles respond to the earth and our body begins that process of befriending gravity. It is the difference between jumping into a still pond and creating a huge splash or gently sliding in and floating, supported by all that is there already.

We respond to kindness and this yoga is tooted in this. Diane has said that the only person who can give you the love to heal is yourself. Our body can be felt to sigh with relief when pushing, pulling, effort and strain are not asked of it. The work is to dissolve tension, not create more and allow our body to move from a deeper place. The idea that we have fragmented movement, analysed our

lives and complicated simplicity gradually becomes clearer as our practice evolves. I have been practicing yoga in this way for over twenty years now and the more I have learnt, the more I know I have to give away. Looking for answers or trying to hold on to knowledge inhibits learning more.

We have become used to being fragmented: most of us do not even know we are. It asks a lot for us to stop and listen to what we need: it asks a lot for us to love our body and not push it into shapes. This yoga changes our perspective because we are not being asked to find answers but acknowledge there is no question.

Donna Negus (August 2022) www.donnenegusyoga.co.uk

References:

Scaravelli V Awakening The Spine 1991 (Harper collins) revised edition 2012 (Pinter & Martin)