

Exclusive Interview by Sun Home web site with Vladimir Afanasyev

“Yoga is the science of life and the art of Self-Knowledge.”
Vladimir Afanasyev (Tejinder)

Please tell us about yourself.

Back in the time when I was young, the things that happened in my life convinced me that life flows on in strictly fixed stages replacing one another as if Destiny had its master plan carried out independent from my will. Since very early, I felt a zest for mysticism and esoteric knowledge which was cherished, supported by life circumstances favorable for its development. Another permanent theme in my life, romantic by its nature, is music, which I am blessed to feel deeply and love, perhaps more than anything else in this life. Both things have been reflected in my professional career, although musical skills remained unclaimed to the full. I have been teaching yoga since 1990 and I shifted to teaching on a regular basis in 2000.

What influenced your choice of vital interests? What made you feel interested in the spiritual traditions of India? How did you start practicing yoga?

I do not think we “choose” vital interests actually. It seems that they get determined by themselves, spontaneously, due to the critical need of a soul to get new karmic experiences through another incarnation.

Spiritual traditions of India attract me intuitively. I have been wired to them since long ago. They brought me in this life to those great souls who have played and continue to play an important role in my development. With love and reverence I say their names: Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, Bhagavan Sri Swami Narayananda and Bhagavan Sri Swami Jyotirmayananda.

As for practicing yoga, I embarked on it at the age of thirteen. There were asanas and some breathing exercises. Since then yoga came into my life.

What made you visit India? Which spiritual teachers have you met in the country?

The dictate of heart and the feeling of love for this country made me visit India. To a greater degree by far, it was a thirst to plunge into the atmosphere of holiness, to crouch down to its sources. My first trip to India, in October 1988, exceeded all my expectations and turned out to be magical, in the truest sense of the word. It was an errand to the divine footsteps of Sathya Sai Baba about whom I had already heard and read much. He welcomed me as a dearest son bestowing me with a rare opportunity to personally interact with Him and His Hand gently guided me throughout the entire trip turning it into a whole, grand spiritual feast.

Afterwards, I made pilgrimage of many days with my Indian friends, which they organized perfectly to the spiritual abodes and temples of South India. In particular, I visited the ashrams of Ramana Maharshi and Aurobindo Ghosh, the international headquarters of the Theosophical Society in Adyar, where I was singled out for a conversation with the president, Mrs. Radha Burnier and many other places. Those times saw the pilgrims from the Soviet Union very rarely (if ever) so I was always greeted very warmly, with intense interest, and often was mistaken for a swami, a monk. Knowledge of English and Indian culture granted me effortless communication. That trip introduced me to Sviatoslav Roerich and one of the best interpreters of Sri Aurobindo's teachings, M. P. Pandit. With the latter, we developed a friendship and we corresponded for a long time.

Further trips to India brought me together with such personalities as: Sri Bujta Baba, a saint clairvoyant from Assam whom I met in Calcutta; Sri Guruswami Kuttappa, a Jnana-Yogi from Karnataka; Devika Rani, the wife of Svetoslav Roerich whom I visited in Bangalore; Hatha-Yogi Sri Nikam Guruji who welcomed me in his Bombay residence and others.

Could you tell about how you first learned about the Siddhas tradition?

I learned about the existence of the Siddha tradition as far back as 1988 from one artist from Baku (Azerbaijan) who immigrated to the U.S.A. During my second trip to India in 1992, I found myself at the presentation of this spiritual tradition held in one of the Bangalore Rotary clubs for businessmen. I was amazed at the high professionalism of the event, its brilliance and beauty. After the presentation, I had a conversation with the presenters. They were Americans, a man dressed in an ochre habit and a woman. I learned later that the woman occupied a high place in the Ministry of Culture in the U.S.A. They invited me to attend their main ashram, Gurudev Siddha Pith, located in the state of Maharashtra. I accepted their invitation and sometime later I visited this Paradise. There I

continued my acquaintance with the Siddha tradition on the line of Nityananda, Muktananda and Gurumayi. There, in the Cave, I spent my first three-day Blue Pearl Intensive Retreat. Then I was invited to participate in a satellite intensive meditation course in Poland, during which I felt especially strong spiritual experiences associated with the Kundalini activity.

The thought that in Russia people know nothing about such a wonderful teachings, with which I was brought together by Providence, bothered me. I started to negotiate with Gurumayi Chidvilasananda (SYDA Foundation) about the creation of the Siddha Yoga Center in Krasnodar. The negotiations were crowned with success. A few months later the first in Russia intensive courses (the so-called “Intensives”) of Siddha Yoga were held in Krasnodar and St. Petersburg. They preceded the creation of the Russian Center, which exists up to this day.

What, in your opinion, is the main aim of Yoga?

The aim of Yoga as a teaching of spiritual liberation is to help a person to free himself from the false identification with the body, senses, the mind and the ego-principle (ahamkara) and to gain freedom from the suffering, caused by it. The path of Yoga is the path of Self-Realization or God-Realization and this is essentially one and the same. The technical side of this long, very complicated process is set out in the second aphorism of the “*Yoga Sutra*” of Sage Patanjali, “Yoga is the cessation [of the modifications process] of thought-waves of the mental substance.” I wrote about the aims of yoga and the basic methods to reach them in my book, “*Light Incorruptible: The Principles and the Methods of Raja Yoga. (Classical Yoga In Systematic Exposition)*” that was published in October 2011.

Could you tell us about your first meeting with Swami Jyotirmayananda? What impact did it have on your life?

Swami Jyotirmayananda entered my life in the beginning of 1990s. The bond between a disciple and a teacher comes into existence and gets realized on various levels of existence and its destiny depends on karmic conditions. The conditions I faced, fortunately, let me easily get in touch with my Yoga-Vedanta Preceptor any time I have a need to. His knowledge of yoga and the mysteries of life and death are astonishing.

On April 10, 2000 Swami Jyotirmayananda awarded me a certificate of yoga teacher in “all its aspect: Hatha-yoga, meditation and philosophy.” Later I was also blessed by Swamiji to establish my own center called The Parashakti Yoga School. As a sign of my deep gratitude and love, I have dedicated the book “*Light Incorruptible*” to Jyotirmayananda.

What issues and topics does your book “*The Notes of a Russian Pilgrim*” address?

The book, published in Saint Petersburg in 2000, is dedicated to the amazing life story of the great Avatar of the Age, Sathya Sai Baba, up to 1970. The second part of the book is more about my reflections on “enduring issues”.

We would also like to know something about your works as a translator. What texts do you translate?

My skill in the English language that has accompanied my whole life in one way or another, the philological scholarship, also long-term experience in learning yoga and mysticism in theory and practice enable me to practice the profession of a translator, though not in a strict sense. I translated some books on yoga and numerous articles. The book “*The Secrets of Prana, Pranayama and Yoga Asanas*” by Swami Narayanananda was translated and published back in 1990. In 2000, I translated and then published the book “*The Art of Positive Thinking*” by Swami Jyotirmayananda that can be readily recommended for anyone to have it as a table book. In my day, I translated “*Yoga Illustrated Dictionary*” by Harvey Day, “*Mind, Its Source and Culture*” by Swami Narayanananda and some more books.

The translation of the yogic literature is a very responsible project, requiring a good knowledge of the subject, free access to reliable references, integrity and intuition. The Russian translations of many yogic books, which I know, leave much to be desired. Some of them are made hastily, clumsily while others sin in accuracies and even errors. The authors of **still others** lack translation experience and a proper knowledge of the Russian language. I really hope that not far off amateur enthusiasts (thanks to them, of course!) will be replaced by professional translators, who will be able to bring to the Russian-speaking reader the high philosophy of Indian sages with the high quality, which is worthy of them.

My Yoga School has been operating for nearly ten years. The blessing on its activities, as I have already said, was given by Swami Jyotirmayananda.

Adhering to the civil line of promoting the cultural and spiritual development of our society, the school has educational, pedagogical and recreational purposes. The priority in it is given to the culture of communication between people who study in the group. We also pay great attention to the culture of speech as the main means of communication. The school professes positive thinking as a prerequisite to the progress on the yoga path, as well as the psychological background, which helps to smooth out the sharp angles of life problems, largely contrived, and to enlighten the path of life by the belief in Providence and the Hand of God. The basis of the theoretical material of the school is the original and carefully selected by me material, that you can trust. The methods and technologies used in the practical part of the training are well tested by my teachers and me. They are safe and effective. This fact gives me the moral right to share experiences and knowledge with other people. Training carried out by the school is creative. Yoga is a science about life and the art of Self-Knowledge, requiring a deeply sensible approach and creative inspiration. Every day brings new possibilities and each lesson is a favorable chance to use them. The school's ideology announces that its priority is the commitment to universal human values, which are beyond the scope of religious, national, social and other dogmas, complicating understanding between people.

Will you let us know in more detail which direction of yoga you represent?

As my Teachers are, I am a supporter of an integral approach to the Yoga practice which implies a positive effect on the entire structure of a human personality: on the physical body, feelings, the mind and the will. Thus, over time, the potential of the soul in the form of virtues will definitely reveal itself and it will endow the man with peace and joy. The condition for success is based on the stability of training and the "step by step" principle, and, of course, the attention, credibility and sincerity. We pay great attention to breathing as a vital factor, a root biological link between the physical body and the psyche. The hallmark of a yogi is not a "Lotus Pose", as many people imagine, but his character and the state of his mind. Our yoga is a young, growing tree which is fueled by the life-giving water of Hatha-, Raja-, Bhakti-, Jnana-, Mantra- and Kundalini-yoga.

What have you personally gained from practicing yoga? What is, in your opinion, the benefit it offers to a modern person?

Self-Knowledge is a long, complicated process of the psychophysical and spiritual transformation. Full of drama, the process of profound change happen not so much at the level of the waking consciousness but rather in the subconscious and the unconscious. This is a process, which does not allow haste. In this world, there is no means capable of giving us health and bringing us joy. Stepping on the path of yoga, we should be ready to face the “shadow side” of our personality: lust, jealousy, envy, anger, pride, greed, etc. But, if we continue to “work on ourselves” systematically and with faith, without losing sight of the main goal, we shall achieve success, namely, a flexible, healthy, well-controlled body, a bright, positive mind and deep peace of mind along with brilliant prospects for the future as well.

What benefits can Yoga can bring to a modern man? The answer to this question, alas, is beyond my competence – it is too delicate. But I would not like to leave it without consideration. One day, my spiritual preceptor Swami Jyotirmayananda was asked a similar question. This is how he answered it, “Yoga can change your life. It can help you understand yourself and solve the problems, which you face day after day. Yoga will give you health, peace of mind and ensure your success. You can get radiant health with the help of Hatha Yoga: special physical poses and breathing exercises. With the help of the training in the mental concentration you will develop the ability to penetrate into the essence of life's problems. Thus, all concerns will leave you. The success depends on your organization, discipline and understanding of life. Just Yoga can give this to you.”

What would you recommend to the users of SunHome.ru web portal to learn in order to succeed in self-improvement and full-fledged development?

We live in an era of the erupting information volcano. Thanks to scientific and technical progress, we have access to a huge volume reservoir of information, relating to the problems of improvement and the comprehensive development, where, however, it is very easy to get lost. But if a man is sincere in his endeavor and desire to change himself for the better, if he is patient, persistent and wise enough not to agree to the promises of an easy victory and fast awards, luck will smile upon him. “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you!”

Any suggestions or wishes for the users and the local administration team of SunHome website, please?

From the bottom of my heart I wish to the users and the local administration team of SunHome website strong health, spiritual and material welfare, personal happiness and successful professional careers. Let the sunlight fill Sun Home more and more each day!

The interview was made by Georgiy, November 15, 2011

<https://www.sunhome.ru/interview/afanasev.html>