

# Verslo Klase Magazine interview from Lithuania with Danny

## **For Danny**

***What aspects of your personal life you disliked so badly that they made you change your entire life? (relations, health problems, etc?)***

When I began learning Yoga in the Hawaiian Islands in 1976 from David Williams and Nancy Gilgoff, it came as an expected magical gift. I had traveled around the world in 1971/72 and my eyes opened then to the amazing world we live in. I spent that year traveling in Europe as well as in SE Asia and East Asia (Thailand, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan). Then I came to Hawaii and after a visit there I hitch hiked across Canada to Toronto. I started coming back to Hawaii a couple of years later and also was making a living from performing in music clubs, singing and playing guitar. I suppose growing up in a city suburb was something that I felt I had to radically change. Also I somehow knew I wasn't born to stay in one place for very long after I had traveled the world. Hawaii especially is a spectacular natural environment with giant mountains, volcanos, rivers, waterfalls, extraordinary beaches and the amazing surf and sea life of the Pacific Ocean...I knew I wasn't destined to stay in a grey, polluted Industrial city for very long or blindly following society's expectations. Yoga came at a time in my life where it reinforced my decisions I had already taken. Plus I knew I wanted to visit Asia again as well as keep exploring the world.

***Do you travel all the time? What are the things in your life you don't need anymore?***

I traveled all the time up until a few years ago. Now I'm moving around the Earth 7 or 8 months a year.

***Do you have a family?***

I don't have any children and I'm not married. My Father is 103 years old and he still lives at his own house. He's my main man and Yoga Master, but he has never done asanas. I realized when he turned 102 that he was my greatest (and longest) Teacher. He's a Master of Love, Compassion, Gentleness, Kindness and Lightheartedness.

***How does your ordinary day look like?***

If I'm not traveling by plane, train, camel or ox-cart, etc early in the day then I do Pranayama for 30-40 minutes when I wake up. Shortly after I do an Asana practice depending upon my energy that day. Usually I do an Asana practice for 1 to 2 hours and then rest for 15 minutes. I play music each day as well. I write songs or work on songs I'm learning. I also record my songs and at various times of the year record with other musicians. I usually have a late breakfast and then a dinner around sunset. I'm vegetarian and do my best to eat organically. Also when I'm in Hawaii I work in the jungle garden surrounding where I live. I swim daily and sometimes surf giant waves. (not more than 2 feet high).

When I'm teaching at workshops or retreats around the world my morning is about the same. I do my own practices first and try to do my teaching in the late morning or afternoon. That way when I lead a class and demonstrate I am completely warmed up and prepared for the class.

I usually do Yoga 5 or 6 days a week.

***You taught yoga the celebrities like Madonna, Sting, Paul Simon. Are they good students? What is a good student?***

They were all amazing, serious and respectful students. Already disciplined and totally successful in their lives when they came to Yoga, they were enthusiastic about the practices and very hard working. After all to stay successful in the entertainment business especially for so many years takes great health, vitality and clarity.

Also it was a great honor for me to teach them, as I'm a musician as well. I had grown up with their music and I loved the opportunity to get to know them personally. I also recognized that if I was careful in the way that I taught them so that they enjoyed learning the practices and clearly experienced the benefits then they would have a profound influence on the spread of the teachings.

I suppose a good student is someone who is enthusiastic, interested, open minded and willing to challenge themselves.

***Do you know many success stories how yoga changed people's life? Can you tell one?***

I know endless success stories about how yoga changed people's lives. I met one girl who had Muscular Dystrophy and walked with two crutches when she came to her first Yoga class. She had a very positive attitude. She did one salutation and fell asleep for 2 hours. The next day she came back and did 2 salutations. She fell asleep again for 2 hours. She kept coming back and every day she got a little stronger. After a while she threw away her crutches. Now she practices Primary series of Ashtanga Yoga and elements of Intermediate series and she has no evidence of the disease left in her body. She works now also in the Healing Arts.

I also met a man at a Yoga retreat I was teaching with David Williams and David Swenson....He had spent years in hospitals constantly bedridden with lung diseases, cystic fibrosis and on feeding tubes and oxygen. He told us that he had watched a TV program in the hospital about Sting and it included Sting doing some Yoga practices and speaking about the effects of Yoga on his life. The man actually took the tubes out of his body and left the hospital. He went straight to a Yoga class and over the next few years used his own effort and hard work to heal himself. Now he is healed and practicing Yoga on a daily basis. He also leads adventure tours to remote areas of the world.

There are many stories like that.

***How yoga is changing itself? When you started practicing it and nowadays?***

Yoga is an evolutionary science and it is also in the process of evolution. Individuals all over the world are nurturing that evolution.

The practices of Ashtanga Yoga have really influenced the world of Yoga in the last 37 years, since they were introduced into the West. I saw what was going on in the Yoga world first hand since I began practicing in 1976 and then teaching around the world from 1979. Generally most Yoga in the early days in the West before the introduction of Ashtanga Yoga were very light practices, resting between positions, with no intention of building heat or creating deep oxygenation of the body. As Ashtanga Yoga became more widespread and popular over the next 3.5 decades it created a revolution in how people learned to strengthen and heal themselves, as well as take responsibility for themselves. As dedicated teachers and practitioners learned the forms some also altered the practices and started creating their own routines but still incorporating the principles of Internal locking, deep ujjayi breathing, creation of heat, alignment and precision in poses and 'correct arrangement' of asanas...Yoga is the ancient science of Flexibility, Strength, Balance, Breath, Healing, Meditation, Aging, Peace, Compassion and Freedom. How this is interpreted by each individual who comes to Yoga is an individual, personal experience. So really it's wide open to interpretation. That is the beauty of a evolution. Everyone contributes.

So many new variations on the forms of Ashtanga And Iyengar Yoga began to appear. Individuals added their own evolutionary ideas to the existing forms. After all it was Krishnamacharya who began the Yoga revolution and evolution last century by incorporating his understanding of the sacred nature of the human body, mind and spirit and recognizing the importance of the practices. He also recognized the importance of gearing the practice to Individuals and creating personalized practices. He himself introduced techniques from wrestling and Western gymnastics into the forms of Yoga that he had learned. His mandate from his teacher was to popularize Yoga. He must be having a good laugh now wherever he is as to how popular it has actually

become.

***How you want to change person's mentality? How the world looks like in your dream?***

I hope to help people recognize the importance of personal responsibility and personal authority. Learning that healing comes from 90% of our own effort and intelligence in how we live our lives is one powerful message of self discipline and Yoga. It's not about the messenger it's about the message. Once you learn the techniques then it becomes self-teaching and self-correcting. Then you don't need teachers or teachings, gurus, intermediaries. I like to guide people to recognizing that the Spirit is communicating with us at all times and that we can communicate with the Spirit. No intermediary is necessary for that. In moments of reflection or stillness we can all ask for guidance. You don't need any Yoga practices to be able to accomplish this.

However taking care of ourselves on deep levels prescribed by the Spirit shows us how to live life healthfully, fully and create our own personal destiny. Also the practices show us how to age with vitality, tranquility and clarity as well as approach transition with acceptance in grace and peace. Ultimately we are creating our dream if we are living our life fully. Yogis are dream-masters...the living dream of life. We are the ones creating our own personal reality. That's the message I like to pass on. The challenges that we face we somehow call to us in order to grow and evolve if we can meet the challenge. Sometimes Yoga is called 'The Technology of ecstasy.'. Shamanism is also referred to as 'The Ecstatic Ways of Knowing.' We can access our joy and happiness from taking care of ourselves in Evolutionary and ancient ways.

In my dream I see positive changes coming as more and more people become conscious of the world they are creating.

The Master of Yoga is not outside of the Self. As the Buddha said...'You are your only Master...Who else?' so this is not about following external Masters but rather recognizing the teachings of Yoga help guide individuals to Mastery. That's a living dream and can help nurture total freedom on the Path of Yoga.

The personal responsibility we gain with Yoga leads naturally to Universal Responsibility. That leads to Community Activism which is discussed in another question.

***Do you feel that, after having started practicing yoga, you stopped aging – also in terms of physical appearance?***

I don't feel any age in particular. However Yoga doesn't stop aging but it radically alters it and slows it down. From my observations on myself and others around the world over the last 36 years I would say that Yoga can add 20 or 30 years or more of active energy on to people's lives. It seems that we are meant to be healthy and active until shortly before our transition. If one eats well and practices Yoga or similar disciplines (Tai Chi, Qi Gong, Kung Fu etc), then at a certain point aging happens rapidly and transition or death is rapid rather than a long drawn out miserable process.

***Yoga and politics. All the revolutions (spiritual as well) occur in the social field. Can yoga become a political movement?***

When people are awake and concerned about the future of their children and coming generations then they become activists. I see that happening all over the world in Yoga communities. Yoga Centers are becoming centers of Activism. People have to become involved because governments are way behind in their vision as well as too manipulated by big corporations who are not interested in well being or true health. After all, Genetically Modified Food Corporations, Chemical Corporations, The Nuclear and Oil Industries, the Pharmaceutical Industry etc., manipulate governments worldwide. All these industries are self-regulating which means there is NO regulation! There is a war going on. It's the war between the conscious and the unconscious. As the Native Americans say...'A spiritual warrior is someone who uses their life force on a continuous basis to create a world of balance and harmony for coming generations. This is the true essence of Yoga. There is now a large group of people worldwide who are practicing Yoga, supporting Organic agriculture

and making healthy lifestyle decisions. This group is a huge economic force. And the giant corporations are noticing this.

***Are you aware of western spiritual traditions? Or western philosophy? What aspects of western culture could be compatible with yoga?***

Yoga fits in with all Western Spiritual traditions. It is not a religion but rather an enquiry and it actually predates Hinduism and all organized religions by thousands of years (or longer). Yoga is part of the oldest Spiritual explorations on Earth. The ancient Egyptians understood Yoga and created many of its original principles and exercises. Shamanism and indigenous native cultures worldwide all have practices that are linked to Yoga philosophy and practices. Yoga is Shamanism. It is about self-realization, self-reliance and self-determination and recognizing that Nature is the original Spiritual guide and teacher. From the birth of Western philosophy in Greece the understanding of the living being of 'Gaia' or Nature as a 'living being' has been a guiding influence in the world. The Gnostics also had the teaching that 'Loving Gaia is the highest calling of humanity'. This is linked with Yoga philosophy and practice. Yoga comes from communication with and observation of nature and like Indigenous philosophy calls for the preservation, protection and restoration of Nature like contemporary philosophical movements of 'Deep Ecology.' Unfortunately the rise of organized religions, which are basically religions of the cities, have been used to politicize spirituality, dominate and abuse nature and manipulate large groups of people according to the will, politics, and hidden agendas of people who want power, money and control. That would be the major religions and economics (Big business).

For people who live busy lives in the west Yoga has become a saving grace, providing balance, tranquility, strength and healing force to help meet the challenges of a complex, modern world.

As in the non-violent movements in recent history like the campaign to end racism and segregation in America in the 60s, as well as the teachings of Jesus, one of the guiding principles of Yoga is 'Never harming another' or Non-violence in thought word and deed.

***Yoga as a leisure. One goes to day-job, eats unhealthy food, doesn't care about meditations, but still practices yoga. What do you think about be a semi-yoga practitioners?***

Every little bit of Yoga helps. As people strengthen and heal through any depth of practice the mind also becomes clearer. Intuition and insight improve as well as ways of seeing. Observant practitioners will even notice that their immune system is boosted instantly even with short practices.

So gradually or suddenly the person awakens to the fact that they need to alter their diet, become more positive, make clearer decisions and drop bad habits. Yoga is meditation and consequently there are endless effects. People make better decisions and over time may recognize that they are creating their own reality.

These are desperate times and Yoga is a desperate measure to help bring humanity back into balance. Just a short practice using deep breath can initiate subtle changes in brain wave function. As Brain wave pulse slows down from Yoga or even exposure to natural environments perception is magnified. More of the brain becomes activated and new information floods consciousness.

***People in Lithuania are very angry and depressed. It is cold most of the time, people still eat a lot of meat there, drink alcohol and Lithuania is number one for committing suicides. What would be your solution (they have no money, yoga is expensive)?***

The situation in Lithuania mirrors many places in the world. Individuals can always break free of conditioned patterns. A group of individuals become a mass movement. This is the story of the spread of Yoga. It started as a grass roots movement in California and Hawaii in particular in the '70s along with the re-introduction of organic agriculture in Industrialized nations. The Health Food industry started really at the same time also in California and Hawaii. From small groups of dedicated individuals the spread of Yoga (and organic agriculture/health food) has spread worldwide.

If someone is determined they can find introductions to Yoga online. They can also find classes that are accessible once a week. Once a week is better than nothing at all. Once you become familiar with some techniques then you can begin to practice them at home. Ultimately it is about creating a personal, private self-discipline. Ideally Yoga is community service. Most teachers and schools recognize that. I think many teachers would let someone into a class just with a donation especially if a person asked the teacher privately and told them their situation. If a teacher doesn't respond to a situation like this with compassion then that teacher is not really teaching Yoga anyway. Yoga is much more than just a physical discipline. It is ultimately 'Soul' work. And compassion, tenderness, kindness and love are ultimately the deepest results we could gain from Yogic explorations. In many communities around the world there are also Yoga teachers bringing Yoga into slums and ghettos, old age homes, hospitals, schools, orphanages, remote regions, etc.

There are many Yoga teachers now as well as endless teacher training programs. As Yoga spreads in Lithuania as it has in even more remote places in the world it will become more accessible to everyone. This is a worldwide phenomena now and the positive impact of Yoga will continue to grow.

***I followed two of your workshops. The second time I felt a big progress I was doing. How you manage to influence people so much?***

I'm glad you saw some progress from the classes. The progress can't be denied if you learn carefully and slowly and judge each practice individually as to what is appropriate for the day. These are deep healing forms so it's the form that does it...and your own effort...Not me!

I do have many years experience so I do my best to pass on the teachings safely and carefully.

Thanks very much.  
Peace and best wishes,  
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