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The path of a Yoga Teacher: An Interview with Ian Gray

Log out. Shut down. Do yoga.



Recently, *The Mindful Rise* spoke to yoga instructor Ian Gray, to discuss his yoga journey and the benefits that regular practice can bring. Ian is a yoga teacher at *Yoga in Daily Life* - a holistic system to nurture the body, mind and soul - based in Queens Park, NorthWest London. The yoga centre offers an escape from the hustle and bustle of the busy city, creating a warm, welcoming and relaxed environment for Londoners to slow down, become more mindful and recharge. You can check out their timetable of classes [here](#).

When did you first discover yoga?

I always knew about yoga but never tried it until I found a leaflet in my letterbox in Queens Park in 2002. I thought I'd give it a try because I had been going to a gym regularly but felt that something was missing in my exercise routine—something where I could combine physical exercise with something more meaningful. I went along to a drop-in

class and all I remember is lying down at the end of the class thinking, “I really need to be doing this!” I’ve been practicing yoga ever since.

2. What made you decide to teach yoga?

After working with the same teacher for a few years, she told me that there was a group of people who got together every week for “Satsang” —which loosely means “in the company of Truth”. I met lots of great people who were really following the true path of yoga—service to others, and a quest for real spiritual development. I then decided to try out one of Yoga in Daily Life’s summer seminars—this one was in the Czech Republic, in a former castle which had been bequeathed to the global fellowship of Yoga in Daily Life. It was a real journey with ups and downs, which inspired me to go to India and tour the five Ashrams which are mostly in Rajasthan. I remember coming back to London and somehow feeling that I my “Seva” —my selfless service—should be to teach others, and to become a vegetarian. My teacher encouraged me to study and observe, and eventually I became a yoga teacher. I’ve been teaching regularly ever since.

3. Can you share some of the benefits of regular yoga practice?

Where do I begin? At first I immediately felt the physical effects of yoga —better posture, less coughs and colds, a stronger “core”, and I noticed my physique seemed a bit better the more I practiced! But it wasn’t long before I realised that these things were only scratching the surface of what I could really gain from yoga. I started noticing that I was responding differently to lots of things—from small stuff like tube delays all the way up to problems in my relationship at the time. I guess I realised that I could more clearly decide if something would be a huge problem, or if I could just decide that it wasn’t going to bother me and eventually it would be resolved. Once I met our Guru, Vishwaguruji Paramhans Swami Maheshwarananda on a family trip to Australia (He just happened to be in Canberra of all places at the same time as me!) I realised that the message of tolerance and teachings of this system really spoke to me, and I started to understand that I could deepen my practice spiritually, with the structure and guidance that was put in front of me. I think we all ask the Big Questions at some stage in our lives, and I don’t think most of us are able to answer those questions without some kind of structure and guidance from those who have true Wisdom. So for me, I know I’ve found that guidance and this is something so much more than that which I observed when I first began this journey.

4. What type of yoga do you teach? Can you tell us a little bit about this.

The system I follow is called Yoga In Daily Life. It was authored in the Seventies by Vishwaguruji when he was instructed by his Guru in Rajashtan to relocate to Europe and spread the classical teachings of yoga. He is part of a lineage—a “Parampara”—whose literal translation from Sanskrit means “an uninterrupted series, order, or succession” and is the traditional method in India by which the “Guru” or teacher passes knowledge down to the “Disciple” or student. His first stop was actually London all those years ago! There were families from Rajasthan who had relocated here to London, who were following this Parampara for generations.

I’ll give you a quote from our international website which explains things better than I can:

Since 1970 he has been living and working in Europe. Through his longlasting activities in the West, Vishwaguruji has become familiar with the way of life and the many problems people face in the modern world, with psycho-somatic consequences of a detrimental lifestyle, stress, fears and mental illness. He has developed a comprehensive master system called Yoga in Daily Life, based on original yoga tradition and specially directed to the situation and needs of modern civilization. The system can be lived and practiced regardless of age, social status, nationality or denomination.

Yoga In Daily Life has had an Ashram where we teach yoga classes in Queens Park, London for over 15 years, and this is where I teach classes along with lots of other volunteers.



5. What is your favourite yoga pose and why?

I don't know if I can give you a favourite pose, or "asana". The classical asanas of yoga are so integrated and scientific in their application, I guess I've always just taken each one as a part of the whole and try not to pick favourites. Actually, it might be better to think of the ones I LEAST enjoy and why that might be. Is it something physical or is it in my mind? If I try standing on my head, what are my fears about that? If I just stand moving my arms up and down for ten minutes, do I get bored or do I see this as a challenge for my mind—to stay focused on this simple, repetitive movement? I always enjoy doing anything that really works on my abdominal area though. This is the seat of the Manipura Chakra, and this is where we say the "Agni" or fire, sits in the body. I can really feel the heat spreading through everywhere and it always feels as if I am getting rid of toxins and tensions, and maybe a few negative thoughts, by stoking that fire!

6. What is the best thing about teaching yoga?

Two things come to mind. Firstly, I know that teaching yoga classes is really my “seva”. It’s how I know I can help others and I really enjoy doing it. In London Ashram, we are all volunteers and we do this for the simple reason that we want to help as many people as possible to learn the classical teachings of yoga, and keeping it as affordable as we can. Secondly, I find that committing to teaching regular classes helps with my own “sadhana”—my own personal path of physical, mental and spiritual development. I always learn so much from the students I meet and I love that.

7. What is the biggest challenge?

We’re all volunteers, and it’s always a challenge finding the time to run classes, help with the administration of our charity, in addition to the daily life stuff—work, family etc. But then I gain so much energy from teaching, it’s not really a big problem. I’d also say that when we deepen our practice, things can come up around our own ego, past experiences, and our own imperfections—things that can be difficult to confront. One of the classic things about a guru-student relationship is that they work with you and all your positive and negative qualities, and sometimes that’s not easy. But in the end I try to trust that it’s all happening to help me somehow.

8. Do you have any tips for busy Londoners on how they can fit yoga into their lives?

We’re all busy and for sure in this city, it’s a challenge—some of us even need two hours to get to work on a bus, three different trains and another bus. But in my life, I’ve found that when we really prioritise something, somehow we find the time for it. I work full-time but I’ve been able to structure my career such that I block out the day from 4pm onwards each Wednesday when I teach at the ashram. It’s a recurring entry in my Outlook and everyone at work knows that I’m not available in that time. Some people can’t do that, but it works for me right now. If we’re honest, we could all probably get to bed that bit earlier and get up ten minutes earlier. Even five minutes of stretching and five minutes sitting in silence, watching our breath can totally change our day. I find the best time to practice is in the morning before work. The atmosphere in the city is calmer. Get into a regular class with a teacher you feel comfortable with, and do try different kinds of yoga. I can guarantee they’re not all the same! What we now call “YOGA” in the West is often far removed from the ancient traditions. As students, we won’t all

respond similarly to certain systems or teachers. I hear things like “I’m not flexible enough for yoga” far too much. It’s kind of an excuse—if you’re inflexible, then you should be doing more yoga! We need to be honest with ourselves and try to find a practice that works for us.

Try and go to retreats or workshops as regularly as you can. We all need to recharge our batteries sometimes and spending even half a day doing yoga and meditation helps a lot. Did you ever think about the word “holiday”? Here’s the Wikipedia entry for the original of that word: *“The word **holiday** comes from the Old English word hāligdæg (hālig “holy” + dæg “day”). The word originally referred only to special religious days. In modern use, it means any special day of rest or relaxation, as opposed to normal days away from work or school.”* Hmm.

9. Why should people practice yoga—in just three words?

Makes Us Happier!

10. What are your five top tips for a happy life?

I won’t pretend to know what to say to this, so let me choose five of the Golden Teachings from Bhagavan Sri Deep Narayan Mahaprabhuji—an incarnation of Divine Love and Wisdom (actually there are six I’d really like to pass on!):

Be kind to all creatures and helpful at all times. In this way you will also help yourself.

Respect everyone equally. Always be ready to help. Without doing good, without right action, life lacks meaning.

Love every living being at least as much as yourself.

Do not ignore the laws of nature. Never disregard nature or nature will take its retribution.

Do not just take, also learn to give. Constant taking creates a serious burden which is only unloaded by the act of giving.

Do not waste your time. Each second of your life is precious and irreplaceable. Time passed never comes back, time doesn’t wait. If you don’t keep up you’ll be left behind, so use your time well.

In addition to weekly yoga classes, *Yoga in Daily Life* is running the following courses over the coming months:

- 8-week Beginners Course | Wednesdays 11th April - 30th May
- Meditation & Pranayama Workshop | 10th March
- Weekend Seminar on *Stress, Cancer and Yoga* | 23rd-25th March
(with Vishwaguruji, founding teacher of *Yoga in Daily Life*)

If you are feeling overwhelmed by all that life is throwing at you, want to find out more about mindfulness and things that are good for the mind, body and soul, please follow *The Mindful Rise*:

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The real magic is in the everyday moments. If you don't slow down and look around once in a while, you could miss them... Share your mindful moments with us, join in using the hashtag [#SlowDownLondonTown](#)

