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INTERVIEW WITH DR KAUSTHUB DESIKACHAR

OPENING TRADITIONAL YOGA TO THE WORLD

PART 2 OF AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
BY YOGI MAHARAJ DR MALIK WITH DR
KAUSTHUB DESIKACHAR

In the last interview for the magazine, you explored the subject of Patanjali's yoga sutras. This is also a subject very close to my heart as I have also been exploring it in the context of yoga. What is its relevance for the student of today?

Patañjali's Yoga sutra is perhaps the single most relevant text for all Yoga students and teachers, irrespective of their era. Whether 2000 years ago, today, or in the future, it will be an invaluable text to understand the essential and core principles of Yoga. If anyone wants to represent Yoga as a teacher or a Yoga educator, a deep and extensive study of the Yoga sutra is critical.

It is relevant for several reasons. But here are three which I consider most important. First and foremost, it is the original text explaining the

Yoga system. Hence it is the ultimate reference text for Yoga. If something is not consistent with Yoga sutra, it is definitely not Yoga. When we understand this, it is easy to realise that things like Dog Yoga, Beer Yoga etc., do not fit under the umbrella of Yoga.

Secondly, it reveals to us that Yoga is not just a set of postures but a way of holistic living. In today's Yoga market, most studios teach Yoga as exercise, not as a lifestyle. And students get misguided that if they did these gymnastic exercises, their life would suddenly improve. But this is not the case. So many people have practised Yoga for a long time yet remain unhappy or unsatisfied with their life. When they start using Patañjali's teachings as a guide, they will understand that Yoga includes so many other things and will start changing their lifestyle, diet and attitudes.





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Thirdly, Yoga sutra teaches us that Yoga is a spiritual discipline, not a materialistic one. In today's times, we have divorced ourselves from the spiritual side of life and have given way too much importance to materialism. Going back to the source text of Yoga, we can start to bring together the spiritual side of life and the material world that we are so used to. And this would be brilliant.

In the last interview you mentioned that some yoga students and teachers have become fanatical and judgmental of those practicing other forms of yoga – please elaborate?

I have seen this trend long ago already. I already wrote about it in the biography I wrote about my grandfather. I was invited to attend a football match on a journey to Brazil in early 2002 or 2003. Being a sports lover, I readily agreed. I assumed I would enjoy a game between two local football teams until we pulled into a park instead of a stadium. I later watched a football match between *Iyengar Yogis* and *Astanga Vinyasa Yogis*.

Intense rivalry is typical in sports, but I had never seen anything like this. Players on both sides were aggressive and angry. They swore at each other frequently, and a fistfight nearly broke out at the end of the game.

Later, when I met with the team captains independently, I asked each one why the game had been so aggressive. They each gave me the same reply - the other team was "enemy camp." It was very sad for me, as both Sri BKS Iyengar and Sri Pattabhi Jois were my grandfather's students, and I am indeed very fond of them as I shared a great relationship with them.

This type of fanaticism has only worsened in recent years with so many more fanatic ideas infiltrating the Yoga world - for example, fanatic views on Veganism, Religious faith, gender identities, etc.

Yoga is also not free from Cancel Culture, and many Yoga students and teachers try to cancel out those who are not in agreement with their own beliefs.

These are sad moments, as we must remain non-judgemental and open-hearted as practitioners and representatives of Yoga.

How can we tackle this fanaticism and/or avoid it and/or what can students and teachers do to reduce or prevent fanaticism arising in their work?

I don't think we can avoid this issue today. Our way of social networking through the internet and media has created a very divisive world. People often tend to be mono-polarised and stick with their own stubborn view of seeing the world. And also, considering we are living in the *Vata* era, it is a sign of the times.

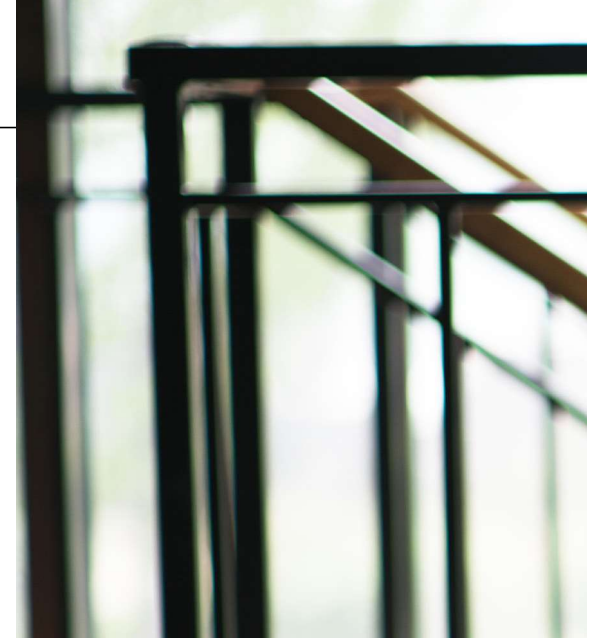
We can avoid this by not being affected by it or letting it drag us down. And instead to focus on our *dharma* and keep putting in our efforts to fulfil this responsibly.

Engaging with such fanatics is futile and a big waste of energy. We will only get exhausted.

Should there be an international regulatory body governing yoga or do you think this is a discipline that can't be regulated in the way that some other areas of practice can? Please discuss

This is a brilliant question. Although I feel that it would be beneficial to have an international regulatory body, I think that at the current moment, this is pointless. First and foremost, this body needs to be constituted of very highly qualified Yogis. The problem is that those who would like to work in such bureaucratic structures would not be Yogis but rather those who would like to control people. Their skill levels are more administrative than philosophical or intellectual.

Secondly, this body must come from India and not from the West. The western mind-set is materialistically oriented, and hence there are



challenges to understanding subtle principles which form the basis of Yoga. The West's approach is matter-based and hence the focus is on matter, what we call *Prakriti* in Yoga. But Yoga includes subtle concepts like *Prāna*, *Puruna* etc., which the West finds challenging to accept or include. So many of these organisations who claim to be the regulatory bodies in, say, the USA, UK etc., are primarily focused on the musculoskeletal approach to Yoga. They don't really understand or even want to understand the subtler domains of Yoga. So how can they be qualified to regulate Yoga, when the more subtle principles that form the core of Yoga are ignored?

A need for such a body comes when Yoga is considered a business. But for me, and many of the traditionalists, Yoga is not just a profession. It is *dharma*. And so there is a different way we see things. You cannot regulate or create a structure for *dharma*. Many in western societies are also unfamiliar with what *dharma* is. So we need to educate them first about this topic. So how can we create a body when most stakeholders don't even understand it?

To be a devil's advocate, many Indian Yogis are too busy fighting with each other over their differences. There is not much Yoga (unity) in the world of Yoga. So creating a standard body where egos can be put aside and a common ground for standards and creating a global vision becomes a bit strenuous.



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Finally, once formed, most of these bodies focus on their survival. And this means compromise. We can see this has already happened, and many of them are merely registries of members rather than making significant contributions to the field. Quality standards drop, and the accumulation of more members becomes a priority rather than standing up to the values of Yoga.

I do hope, though, that in the future, some of the best minds in



Yoga, who are very well trained in all the aspects of Yoga, will form such an international regulatory body of Yoga, with its headquarters in India, the land of Yoga. Till then, we can take comfort in the fact that Yoga has survived over 5000 years of history without a regulatory body. This is worthy of serious contemplation.

Your organisation is expanding internationally which is a great achievement – well done. Please can you elaborate more on the background to these affiliate schools in Brussels and the aspiration to open in New Zealand and Spain? You also mentioned that foundation in Singapore is playing a big role in taking your tradition internationally. What have been the challenges and the positive aspects of going international and how would you say is quality controlled?

Our goal is not to be the most popular Yoga school with millions of students worldwide. Our vision is to continue to be the best quality school and sustain our 1200+ year old tradition for the next 1200 years. So we are cautious in choosing who our affiliates are and who are not. We only allow our students who have been well trained with us for a very long time, to become qualified to open affiliate centres. And they must also adhere to our code of ethics and values to be an affiliate centre.

Viniyoga Singapore is one of the affiliate schools I started in 2019. It was created with the vision of Parallel of bringing *Viniyoga* across Southeast Asia, with activities in Singapore, Malaysia, China, South Korea, Japan, Indonesia, and other neighbouring countries.

We have faced many challenges since its inception, but thanks to God, we are not only managing it but also have learnt a lot from it. Our biggest challenge has been the COVID-19 crisis, which began just months after our creation.

The positive thing is that we have learnt to innovate fast and see how

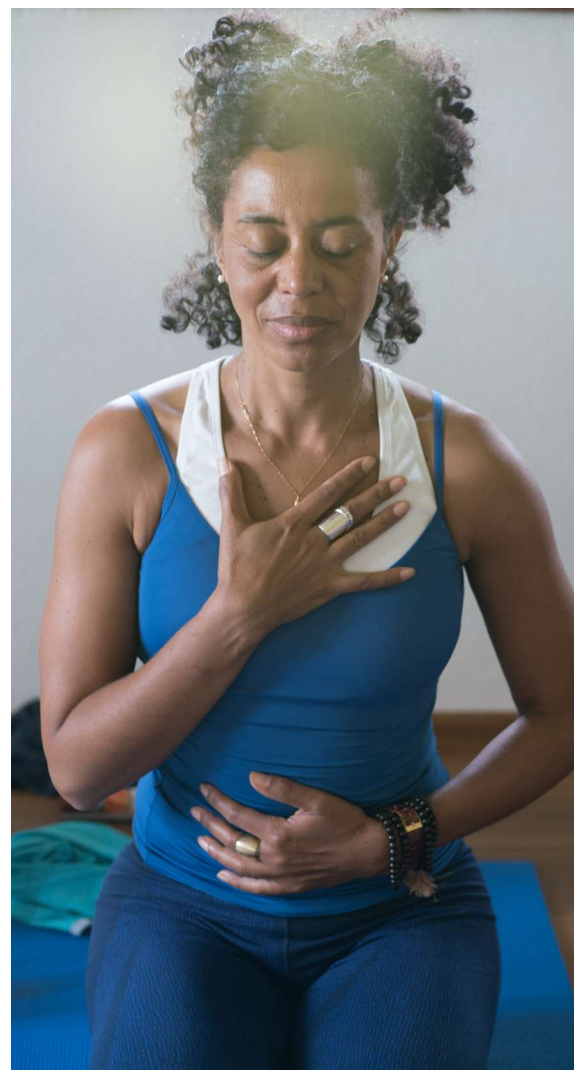


we can offer many of our teachings online, which has helped us reach new students we would not have met earlier. Singapore also provides us many advantages that help us to achieve our mission effectively. We are very grateful for this.

You spoke about the "The Heart of Yoga" last time and mentioned that your father presented the book in way that it could be accessible to everybody. Please could you elaborate more on this classic text, its form, and the underlying theoretical and philosophical meanings that students and teachers can take away with them? I am mindful that the book covers many aspects but if you could focus on at least 1 to 2 that would be great.

This question makes me really happy. Thank you for asking about my father's book, *'The Heart of Yoga'*. I feel that among the books on Yoga in English, meaning in the modern era, this is the best book on Yoga. I would say this even if I were not my father's son. This book is just brilliant.

Two most important things I feel this book offers are the following. Firstly, it presents the principles of Yoga in the most accessible manner



for beginners to understand. To explain such important concepts is not easy, and my father does a brilliant job of doing just this. No one who has ever read this book has told me they found it difficult to understand. This is perhaps why this book is recommended as one of the most important textbooks in many Yoga Teacher Training Programs worldwide. Even those not in our tradition.

Secondly, it clearly presents the need for personalising Yoga practices as each of us is different, and hence we need a course that fits us, rather than the other way around. In this book, fundamental principles of practice, how to sequence the practice, what parameters to consider for personalising the approach, etc. are presented lucidly. This is priceless wisdom!

Now, if I can add a third aspect, it is the translation and commentary on the Yoga sutra, which itself can be a separate book. So this being included in *'The Heart of Yoga'* makes it a much value-added book.

Please can you provide 4 practical tips, on the practice of yoga that students can take away with them and apply to their practical yoga routine?

The four principles I would suggest which are very easy for all to embrace are the following.

First, sleep early and wake up early. Second, get your practice in the morning. Most of the time, when you miss it in the morning, you will probably not be able to make it up later. Thirdly, eat healthy and try to not eat too full. This will hinder your practice. A plant-based diet is more suitable for Yoga practice. However, this is also dependent on the individual's preference. Fourth, find a work-life balance. We are social beings and hence how we relate to our family and friends has an important impact on our wellbeing, health, and also productivity at work. And what is the point of earning all that money, if we don't have time to spend and enjoy it? We have a saying in India - 'When we have teeth, we have no peanuts. When we have peanuts, we don't have teeth.' We must create a situation where we can still enjoy the peanuts while still having the teeth!

Please can you speak in some more detail about any aspects of your father or grandfather's legacy and contribution to yoga? Of course, their life work has made a vast contribution to the world of yoga, but some words, in your own words here, would be worthy of mention.

My grandfather's and father's contributions to Yoga are indeed invaluable. So much has been written and said about this by so many people. I myself have made a number of videos that are available on my Youtube Channel for people to watch. They can watch it at - www.youtube.com/c/kausthubdesikachar

However, what I would like to say is two things—one each about my grandfather and father.

My grandfather was responsible for bringing back Yoga from the caves in the Himalayas to the common public of India. He could have chosen to live there as a Yogi and found enlightenment himself. But he did not do that. He not only found enlightenment living among people but also helped so many others illuminate their own lives. This is what makes him so extraordinary.

In my view, my father was the chief engineer of Yoga. Even though he never practised as an engineer, despite qualifying as a civil engineer in university, he built so many

bridges that benefited Yoga and its practitioners. He built bridges between my grandfather's generation and the current one. He linked the east and the West geographically and in terms of the oriental and occidental approaches. He brought together western medicine and Yoga. He brought together spiritual traditions and scientific methods. So in a way, he built bridges between previously disconnected sides. And he did this all so harmoniously. Therein lies his genius. Therein lies his humanity.

You mentioned you are working on some new book projects, please discuss further, i.e. how you came about to write the book, inspiration, and subject matter.

I am always working on books, both my own and bringing out translations of my grandfather. Currently, we are working on two *Yogasūtra* projects. One is the English translation of *Yogavallī*, the commentary of my grandfather. The second is my own commentary on the *Yogasūtra*. Both will take some time to come to fruition, as they are not easy projects. But apart from these, I am also working on other publications. I will share more when the time is right!

My inspiration for all the books comes from my ancestors and my teacher.

Dr. Kausthub Desikachar is the successor and current lineage holder of the classical Viniyoga tradition of T Krishnamacharya & TKV Desikachar. He is an acclaimed yoga teacher, yoga therapist, healer and spiritual adviser. His objectives include the sharing of the authentic teachings of Yoga to the modern era, as well as building bridges between different healing modalities to promote physical, emotional social and spiritual health. As a Yoga educator, Dr. Kausthub Desikachar is known for his remarkable, deep, and well-versed knowledge and his ability to present the ancient teachings in a way that is profound as well as applicable for modern-day practitioners. He treats each student with respect, compassion, and dignity, and honors their capacity for growth and transformation. His teachings are especially beneficial for yoga teachers and yoga therapists as he helps them grasp the fullness and deep insights of the ancient teachings so that they are able to apply them in a competent and sincere way. For more information on his work, [visit www.viniyoga.com.sg](http://www.viniyoga.com.sg)

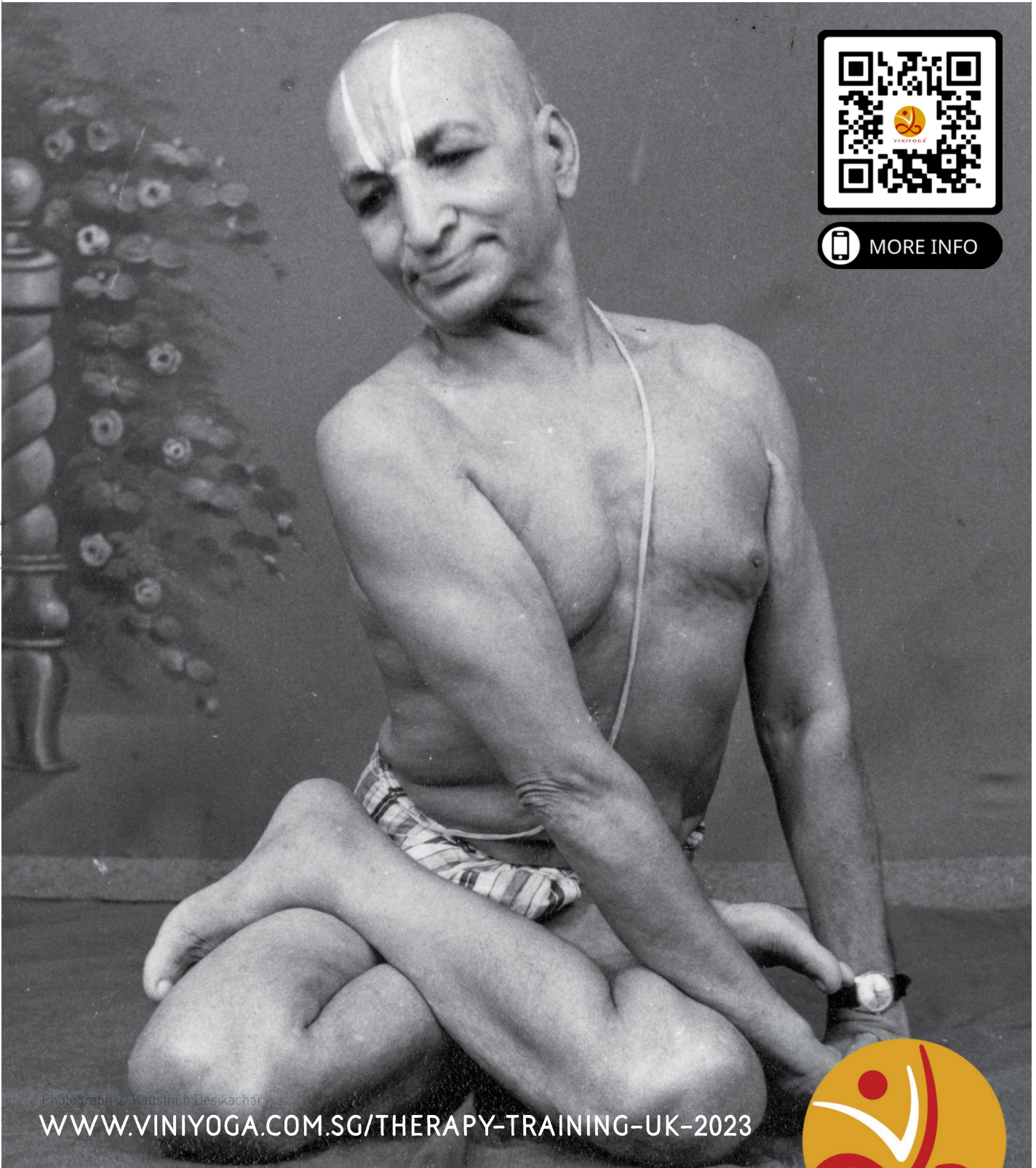
HOLISTIC VINIYOGA® THERAPY TRAINING

IN THE CLASSICAL TRADITION OF T KRISHNAMACHARYA & TKV DESIKACHAR



 MORE INFO

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COURSE OUTLINE

Following the holistic and classical teachings of Professor Sri T Krishnamacharya and TKV Desikachar, this extensive training will:

- Present the most important principles of Viniyoga Therapy as a self-empowering, holistic and complementary health system
- Provide comprehensive training in the understanding and application of the vast array of tools that Viniyoga offers to holistically address a wide range of health concerns
- Help you understand and learn how to implement the one-to-one approach to the healing of Viniyoga
- Explore the role of Viniyoga in developing and supporting a wellness-oriented lifestyle
- Educate on professional and ethical standards under which Viniyoga Therapy must be practised
- Assist in providing a safe environment to facilitate the trainees in the often challenging journey of personal and spiritual development, as well as the evolution of their own unique strengths as healers

Tools of Yoga Therapy you will learn:

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A comprehensive understanding of these tools and how to utilise them in individualised Viniyoga Therapy will form a core part of the training.

Testimonials

We learn that healing can only come from a heart-to-heart connection, and this is the most challenging and beautiful part of the training in my view.

- Marion B, Yoga Teacher, France

This training has healed my relationship with my family and the people around me at a very deep level. More importantly, I can teach from myself and live with my truth.

- Hitomi N, Yoga Teacher, Belgium/ Japan

YEAR	MODULE	DATES
2023	Module 1	16 - 26 March 2023
2023	Module 2	7 - 17 September 2023*
2024	Module 3	March/April 2024 (Precise dates to be announced)
2024	Module 4	September 2024 (Precise dates to be announced)
2025	Module 5	March/April 2025 (Precise dates to be announced)
2025	Module 6	September 2025 (Precise dates to be announced)

Exact dates will be communicated with the acceptance letter.

CERTIFICATION

All successful graduates will be issued with Viniyoga® certification and will be listed on the official Viniyoga registry as an accredited Yoga Therapist. They are also eligible to be certified as Level II Advanced Yoga Certificate by the Indian Yoga Association.

APPLICATION PROCEDURE

Participants must complete an application form, and send it on or before 31 January, 2023. The application form for this training is available online via the following link - www.viniyoga.com.sg/therapy-training-uk-2023-apply.

It is strongly advised to apply early, as this course tends to get fully booked very soon.

VENUE

Dorchester Yoga and Therapy Centre

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Dorset DT1 1TU England
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