



A wish fulfilled

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PujyaSwami Dayananda-ji would have been pleased, I thought, as I read the email from an English lady called Amanda thanking my wife Sonali and I for starting the World Yoga festival. Her email continued:

"I was introduced to yoga when I was 14 years old by my sister. I was spending a lot of my time sitting and studying and thinking of doing something to keep fit. She gave me an old book of yoga exercises and I found it fascinating. I have practiced the physical and breathing exercises ever since (I was 50 this year) The deeper aspects - meditation and philosophy I have only ever glimpsed, maybe because I felt very rooted in the physical world. The talk at the festival which I accidentally (maybe serendipitously!) heard, fired up my curiosity, and I feel it's time to learn."



This is the type of person Pujya swami-ji had in mind when he expressed the wish that **"we need an authentic yoga festival in the West."** He wanted Yogis to be able to easily find Vedanta after mastering asana and pranayama. For the past 4 years Sonali and I have been trying to fulfil that wish and this email was a welcome indication of progress. To turn just one mind onto the path of discovery is rewarding enough but this has been repeated over and over again. The word is getting out. People are telling their friends and they are coming. Over 1400 people descended upon Beale Park just 50km west of London, UK for 4 days of classes, workshops and talks on all aspects of Yoga, Ayurveda and Advaita Vedanta. The priceless jewels of India sparkling in the English summer sunshine for everyone to enjoy.

They came from all over the world from Canada to Colombia, from New Zealand to Norway and, of course, many from the UK. Mostly western, mostly female and mostly above 40. This group has it all, but contentment still eludes them and they feel that *“It’s time to learn.”*

The Welcome lamp was lit by (left to right) Swami Brahmaavidananda from the Arsha Vidya lineage, Dr. Hansaji Yogendra, head of the Yoga institute in Mumbai (oldest Yoga Institute in India), Dr. Parthasharathy the head of SDJ Ayurveda clinic from Anaikatti (who treated Pujya Swamiji), Garth McLean, senior Iyengar teacher from Los Angeles and Dr. Ananda Bhavanani, professor of Yoga therapy from Pondicherry.



With the wisdom of India brought to their doorstep, one would naturally expect a large contingency of Indians to attend but this is not the case because they feel that there is nothing anyone can teach them about their own culture. A classic case of not knowing how little one knows. Such people need to experience in order to be convinced. My hopes were raised last year when a young British born girl of Indian origin came over to me and shook my hand saying:



“Thank you, thank you, thank you. I realise now how very little of my Indian heritage I know. All this knowledge has overwhelmed me. I was not taught any of it. My parents do not know. They need to know and I will bring them next year”

The same young girl, introduced me to her mother this year. A gleaming Indian woman in her 60s, never attended a festival before but was just loving being here. She had lost count of the number of times she had thanked her daughter for bringing her, and she promised to bring her husband next year! Slowly but surely the Indians are coming.

There is no barrier to learning when you place the familiar and the new in adjacent marquees and allow people to choose where to go, who to listen to and how long to stay. All we guarantee is that the masters and teachers are the very best in the world. Knowledge has to be taught and we are blessed that the finest teachers give up their time to come and teach at the festival. Not easy in a large class of mixed ability. The teachers have to be good very good indeed.



Like minded seekers feel part of the same family there is no race, colour, religion or status that divides, just a deep desire to know that unites them. Kindness flows, the love is palpable and young or old, we all revel in the peace and tranquility that unfolds.

Beale Park is a beautiful estate beside the river Thames (the same river that runs through central London). There is plenty of space for camping on site which is necessary for those who

want to take in everything at the festival where classes start at 7am and evening candle-lit meditation can often continue until midnight. All the classes take place in giant tents or marquees, the largest of which can accommodate over 2000 people. There is shelter against any adverse weather so that nothing can stop the enjoyment.



36 teachers from around the world included 5 swamijis, 3 from the Arsha Vidya lineage. All the great traditional Yoga schools were represented with Iyengar, Ashtanga, KYM and Sivananda taking a prominent role. Local yoga teachers supplemented teachers from abroad to provide a broad perspective.

40 Video recording of classes have now been published on the festival's youtube channel <https://www.youtube.com/c/worldyogafestival> so that anyone, whether they came to the festival or not, can access the teachings free of

charge. That is the vision of the Arsha Kula Foundation - the UK registered charity that is behind the festival. Its mission is to bring all these traditions to the west. There is nothing quite like the direct teaching at the feet of a guru but it is important to make the material available to others not fortunate enough to have been at the festival in person. There should be no barrier to learning. As Sonali and I took our last view over the lake on the closing day of the festival having witnessed the transformation of many who attended, we felt blessed. A little tear came to my eye as I pondered that maybe, just maybe, we were witnessing a wish fulfilled. **HarihOm.**