

Inspired by Vanda Scaravelli

"This new attitude in performing asanas is like an initiation. To absorb the teaching requires infinite time and no ambition, but as teachers like to teach, it thus becomes easy for the pupils to learn".

In early Spring 2002, Diane Long passed through London on one of her regular visits to her friend and fellow student of Vanda Scaravelli, Sophy Hoare. Below are a few reflections on the lasting legacy of this inspiring and exceptional Western Yoga practitioner.

Q *You practised for a long time and had very close relationship with Vanda Scaravelli*
Diane Long:

Yes, I feel very fortunate to have practised with Vanda. She was a very strong character who really impressed me. For Vanda, it was the way of working that was so important. She also really stressed the importance of one's own personal practice. She never tried to guide at all, merely to share the depth of her own practice with others. She would return to her own deep source each day, linking the ever deepening power of breath to the movement of the spine, strengthening the power of attention in both mind and body.

Q *How did Vanda become involved in Yoga?*

DL: Vanda began Yoga when she was 50. Spending summers in Switzerland where she hosted Krishnamurti, she invited Krishnamacharya to come to teach them. He did not travel and instead suggested that BKS Iyengar and Desikachar, his students, come to give them instruction. For three summers Vanda, Krishnamurti and Yehudi Menuhin (who was also a house guest) had individual lessons with these two teachers. Living in Rome in those years Vanda continued with her interest in Yoga until 'it took her by the hair' and she moved back to her childhood home in Tuscany.

Q *How did you get to meet Vanda?*

DL: I moved to Florence in Italy in 1971 and began Yoga with Dona Holleman a few years' later. Having tried to have a sensible occupation (manuscript restoration) and yet always being drawn to dance, sports and martial arts, Yoga captivated me. Dona had worked with BKS Iyengar and moved to Florence. One day I went with Dona to a Tai Chi demonstration in a large warehouse space. As we were sitting, I was looking around the room and noticed a woman beckoning to me to come over. I did. She took my hand and told me to come to see her and that her name was Vanda. Several months later, I was invited by a friend to go to a beautiful villa for lunch. It was Vanda who opened the door and, as if it were only the day before that I had met her, took me to



vanda scaravelli

the hand and led me to her tiny room with a grand piano and lovely view of the hills. She began doing backbends and describing to me what she was doing ... 'You must come and study with me', she told me. It was to be our secret. I continued going to Yoga classes and went to Vanda as often as I could. This went on for 4 or 5 years until I made the decision to dedicate myself to Vanda and her approach to Yoga. I convinced two of my friends, Sandra Sabitini and Elizabeth Pauncz, to try to work with Vanda and thus began our 'school'.

Q *How long did you stay in Italy?*

DL: I continued seeing Vanda several times a week over a period of 20 more years until her death. In the mid 1980s, Mary Stewart came for some lessons with Vanda, having heard of her from her friendship with Dona. Sandra and I began teaching in the UK. It was not until 6 or 7 years later that I met Sophy Hoare and she became my hostess/student/friend/colleague in London. Sophy and I found we both shared the same understanding of Vanda's work and the desire to be able to go deeper.

Q *How would you describe Vanda's qualities as a teacher?*

DL: Vanda helped people to develop a clearer eye to what they are looking for. It is not so much about the personality of a Yoga teacher, but the ability to help others come to a closer understanding of the body and mind's strength ... Vanda helped to awaken in others the teacher within. This means that there is no need for another external teacher.

Over the years I knew Vanda, many people passed through to have a lesson or a weekend or a week of lessons. Each person received care, attention and some key of how to awaken an energy within. She was extremely perceptive, had a lovely sense of humour, was very strong willed, fiercely independent, gentle, forthright, open and light-hearted! As one's attention and dedication grew, she became very strict, very exigent that the refinement be always deeper. As a great teacher, she nurtured discovery and intelligence and celebrated the freedom that was awakened.

Q *Do you visit the UK often?*

DL: Recently, I have been coming to England for a month twice a year. There is a growing interest in this approach to Yoga. I stay with Sophy, whom I have got to know very well over time. We share the same goal and ideas. We work very closely together.

Thank you very much.

For further information concerning Diane Long's classes and teaching programme, you may contact: www.dianelongyoga.com.



Q *When did you first become involved with Yoga?*

Sophy Hoare:

I began in the late 1960s/early 1970s. The first class I attended was at the Dance Centre in Floral Street, Covent Garden. I was involved in an acrobatic dance class and one Saturday afternoon noticed a sign up for Yoga. I was curious. All I knew about Yoga at that point was that you worked with bare feet and that it helped you to become more supple. I met with Penny Nield-Smith and stayed with her as my teacher for several years and enrolled at various of her classes in London. I then moved to Sussex and started another Iyengar class only to discover that the teacher would be leaving within a term. He suggested that I could carry on the class. I was horrified! I had no aspirations to be a Yoga teacher. I called Penny who encouraged me 100%. Not long after that a teacher training course was introduced. I later moved back to London where I met with Mr Iyengar several times at classes. Having 3 young children at the time, I was unable to make the journey to Pune. I carried on teaching in London in a mixture of Adult Education venues and private halls. Later I incorporated a studio into our house which I now use for classes.

Q *How has your practice been influenced by Vanda?*

SH: 20 years ago, I went on a course with Angela Farmer. It was extraordinary. My whole body woke up. I wanted to know more. I didn't realise it at this point but this coincided with the brief period that Angela had worked with Vanda. The experience had greatly influenced the way she practised. A number of years later, I worked with Mary Stewart who had also worked with Vanda. She started teaching the principle methods of Vanda in the UK using the same ingredients: the importance of working with the ground, with the breath, lengthening the spine. It gave the most amazing feeling. At last I had found the source. I didn't meet Vanda immediately. After about 2 years working with Mary, I had a call out of the blue, 'Did I want 2 lessons with Vanda one to one?' This was the only way she taught. We met in Mary's flat. Vanda asked me why I had not been to Florence. I explained that I had four young children and there were financial considerations. 'You can stay with me', was her reply. So it was that I travelled to Florence as a family and I began my relationship with Vanda. This all happened about 11 years' ago.

Q *What was it like staying with Vanda?*

SH: It was very intense when I was there. I stayed in Vanda's house and we spent a good deal of time together apart from our sessions of Yoga.

Q *How did you get to meet Diane?*

SH: We did not meet immediately. But during one visit I saw Diane practising at Vanda's. When I saw her body moving, I could feel the same qualities of movement as Vanda. I had never before seen anyone else in whom this was so evident. I asked Diane to help me to learn more. At the same time, we became friends. I invited Diane to England to teach students and for the past 7 or 8 years, Diane comes at least twice a year. She always stays with me for about 2 weeks. We have also worked together in North Carolina and spent time in India.

Q *What is your teaching schedule now?*

SH: I teach regular weekly classes and also, increasingly, offer one to one tuition. I also lead a number of weekend workshops in this country and abroad. At the moment, in conjunction with John Stirk, we are half way through the current teacher training course, aiming to deepen people's practice and way of working, also introducing anatomy and physiology and a short history and philosophy of Yoga. A further course is planned to begin next year.

Q *What do you consider to be the main qualities of Vanda's style of Yoga practice?*

SH: Her constant refining of the attention in each pose. When one starts along the path, one is successively led a little further until the way of working itself becomes one's teacher. The standard postures are used but as vehicles for this self exploration. The variety depends upon the student. Different teachers work at different paces. When one is doing a pose, the position provides the framework. The essence of the practice is very much experiential. So much can be misinterpreted or become misleading by the use of mere words. For example, the importance given to grounding does not mean to push the heels hard into the ground. In each pose, one seeks to become in tune with the breath and hence alive to the very core of one's body. This is not merely a formula to be repeated but an experience for each individual to discover for him or herself.

Many thanks.

For details of Sophy Hoare's classes and workshops, you may contact Tel: 020 8675 5721. A video entitled 'In the Spirit of Vanda' which shows the way of practice is available.

Details of the forthcoming Teacher Training Course may be obtained from Penny Seabrook on Tel: 020 8947 3113.

