

Joanna Najduch takes time out with Granville Cousins, an inspiring yoga teacher whose practice has indeed come...



Full Circle

Yogis and yoginis in the Manchester area have long thought themselves fortunate to have a yoga teacher like Granville Cousins in their midst.

An imposing six feet tall, born and bred in Manchester of West Indian descent, Granville cuts a formidable figure by any standards. Add to this his foundation in martial arts, his iyengar yoga training, together with over 20 years' experience teaching astanga yoga, and you just might begin to believe that us northerners are indeed on to something!

I first met Granville a few years ago when I was deciding whether or not to pursue an astanga teacher training course. After attending his classes for a while I was inspired and duly started on my own yogic journey. I continued to practise with Granville throughout my training, as I found his teaching methods and wide knowledge of yoga helpful in developing my own yoga style and practice. However I have always been intrigued by Granville and wanted to discover more about this quiet, unassuming yogi and the paths that led him to become a yoga teacher.

We meet in Manchester after one of Granville's yogasana classes and I ask him to take me back to his yoga beginnings. He tells me that he first came to yoga in his late teens when he saw one of his schoolfriends trying to place his hands behind his back in the posture of namaste. After being told that this was yoga, Granville became interested and decided that this strange exercise technique merited further investigation. At this time in the early 1970s, Richard Hittleman's TV programme *Yoga for Health* was being shown by the BBC and Granville soon became an avid viewer. Although he found the postures challenging as he possessed no natural flexibility, his appetite had been whetted and he soon looked for other avenues where he could explore and develop this new passion in his life.

At that time in Manchester, "live" yoga classes were few and far between. So Granville spent many hours copying and perfecting the postures from yoga books.

Yoga and Health by Selverajin Ysudian and Elizabeth Haigh provided him with his first major breakthrough. He used to practise

with one eye on the book, whilst at the same time trying to execute the postures and do the breathing techniques!

"I was thrilled when I came across B K S Iyengar's book *Light on Yoga*," says Granville. "I was so inspired by his excellent performance of the postures and the in-depth detail in the text that I used to practise for 3 to 4 hours every day using the tables at the back of the book."

However after a solid six months of intense practice on his own without any "hands-on" yoga instruction, Granville found the whole experience somewhat overwhelming, and channelled his energy into tai chi where he could attend regular classes with real instructors.

"I stayed with martial arts for about 10 years and gained my 1st dan (black belt) in kung fu, and then later studied aikido. Also during this time I became interested in Buddhism and meditation. After attending a 10-day retreat with the Venerable Archarn Sumedho, a monk of immense stature and knowledge in the way of Buddha, I realised that my path of self knowledge would be enhanced by becoming a Zen Buddhist."

So what began as a short stay at the Zen training monastery at Throssel Hole Priory in Northumberland became an intense six months of a lay training programme for Granville.

"I regard this period as one of the richest times of my life. My role at the monastery was to do with joinery work and as that was my trade I put my skills to good use."

After leaving the monastery Granville once again turned his thoughts to yoga and he began his path of yoga by embarking on an iyengar teacher training course. After obtaining his intermediate teaching certificates, Granville began to teach yoga in Manchester, and in 1990 together with his fellow students he took the chance to practice yoga in Pune, India at the Ramamami Institute with Mr Iyengar himself.

"This was such a rewarding experience, being in the presence of

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one of the great yogis of the modern age, and he left a lasting impression on me. When I returned to England I knew that a new direction had been forged for me and yoga was destined to be my pathway in life."

After successfully teaching iyengar yoga for some years, Granville was introduced to Astanga Vinyasa yoga and this led to his meeting with the late Derek Ireland. It is clear that Granville still has a great deal of respect for everything he learnt from his association and friendship with Derek.

"Derek Ireland was a wonderful and inspiring yoga teacher to

whom the yoga world has much to be grateful. He accepted my application to teach for him at 'the practice place' in Crete. Those days were sheer bliss for me - studying astanga with Derek and his partner Radha in the morning and teaching iyengar yoga in the evenings! Tough... But very rewarding!" says Granville.

On his return to Manchester Granville began to teach astanga yoga and asana classes and this has been the cornerstone of his excellent teaching reputation.

I asked Granville about his views on meditation and whether the influences of diet and lifestyle are important for us to truly embrace yoga. He pauses for a moment in thoughtful contemplation before answering.

"I practise the vajrayana school of Tibetan Buddhism under the guidance of the Venerable Geshe Kelsang Gyatso Rinpoche. The requirements for this path I have chosen are an ethical lifestyle, a vegetarian diet, abstention from alcohol and drugs and to devote a certain proportion of the day in quiet meditation helping to develop the heart and become a more conscious being.



I see [my yogasana class] as a way of clearing the clouds of the mind so we can again bathe in the radiance of the sun.



“During these times when the planet needs to be treated with respect, I feel that ecology and working with the environment are crucial issues. I myself have an organic reed-bed system installed on my farm which deals with all my sewage and grey water. In the summer when the reeds are blooming, it is really beautiful – just like a garden! There are no chemicals involved as the whole process relies on the natural elements and bacteria living around the roots of the reeds.”

An image comes to mind of Granville’s rural farmhouse set high in the hills of Lancashire, the fields planted with 4-foot tall willow Norfolk reeds gently swaying in the breeze.

“Doing your utmost to keep your living environment pure as well as your body is one of the ways we can begin to embrace yoga, and develop our spiritual side in relation to the natural world.”

With this in mind I was keen to know if Granville had also seen a development of his yoga practice and if this too had evolved through time.

“Yes, most certainly. I am now at the stage in my life where I feel as though my life in yoga has come full circle. I am increasingly being drawn to the traditional practice of the ancient yogis. My yogasana class is a classical style of yoga practice aimed at stilling the thought processes and opening up the energy pathways, thereby achieving a peaceful and happy state of mind. I see it as a way of clearing the clouds of the mind so we can again bathe in the radiance of the sun.”

With Granville’s wide experience teaching classes and leading retreats and holidays around the world – Ireland, the Middle East, Portugal and the Caribbean to name a few locations – I asked Granville if this type of yogasana class is what fellow yogis would come to expect on one of his workshops or holidays.

“Yes, I aim to give a wide variety in my workshops and holidays. Having realised the benefits of working with my own psychic and pranic energy to develop the postures I aim to help my students

achieve this same goal,” he says.

“I see the postures as a tool which can be used to access energy flow in the nadis and chakras and this is what I concentrate on. I really enjoy working closely with small groups of students as it enables me to see them develop first-hand through regular practice. And of course daily yoga practice is so much more fun if you are doing it on the island of Tobago, or a beautiful country retreat in Portugal or Spain!”

Granville’s yoga holidays are underpinned with early morning and evening meditation sessions where the students are encouraged to sit quietly in the midst of their own experience.

“Through the practice of meditation we learn to understand our humanity, transcend our mortality and merge into the bliss of true being. Only then can we become more conscious and enjoy more happiness.”

So what does the future hold for Granville? I asked how he envisaged his yoga practice in 10 years’ time.

“I have come to perceive my yoga practice as a ‘work in progress’. I have found that as our practice matures, we have to adapt our yoga accordingly. We need to move into the space of greater understanding and adaptation. Even now after many years teaching I am still learning, still evolving, still seeking to get the most out of my yoga sadhana so that I can pass on these experiences to my students. In the future I would like to see myself teaching on more retreats and holidays allowing me the opportunity to share my understanding in a more personal setting. We must all learn to practise yoga with a good heart and a sincere wish to benefit others. This is our quest, this is yoga. May we all grow in love and light.”

More information on all Granville’s classes, workshops and holidays can be found on his website www.yogawithGranville.com.