

how I came to yoga

David Balen



When I was born in 1948, the war had not long ended. England was broke, felt parochial and drab. My parents worked very hard to provide for my sister and I. They weren't into spirituality as such, but offered me an ethical and conventional world view based on family life, getting a good education and then a career. People only bought things when they had saved up the money. Credit was not easy to come by. We lived in an internet and mobile phone free society. Life outside of suburbia was an adventure, and we occasionally peeked into it.

The strands of business and music have woven themselves into the fabric of my life thanks to my parents and their forefathers' influences. Over the years, my parents always tried to be supportive of my education and well-being, but I guess ours was a typical culture and generational clash. Not unusually, communication and relationships weren't easy between siblings and parents. The war years had encouraged stoicism. Expressing deep feelings and philosophy were not really on the agenda. I pursued poetry, improvised music and creativity and rebelled.

I hit the India/Katmandhu Trail with my French friend, Armand. He wanted to learn sitar, and I the tablas. It was the time the Beatles were in Rishikesh seeking spirituality. Our 12 month odyssey, which included living in Varanasi for 4 months, helped me break out of my suburban-induced sleepwalk and we still reminisce about it. It also involved me getting seriously ill with infective hepatitis which brought me close to death's door.

I met people on the road who introduced me to macrobiotics, Yoga and the inner side of life via conversations and books. I embraced immediately a passion for health, spirituality and diet, in addition to music. Returning to the UK, I pursued life as a professional musician whilst deeply involved in my own eclectic take on the spiritual path with the help of friends, books, lectures and groups.

An intellectual and meditational pursuit of Yoga was eventually grounded by experiencing Yoga classes in 1971. Kundalini Yoga entered my life through a musician contact. I did a teacher training course and was thrown in at the deep end by being unexpectedly told to teach one of the classes. After the initial panic, I found I enjoyed teaching and reaching out to people.

So I developed my own eclectic style, using readings, music, meditation, visualisation and little homilies, teaching in various locations until 1977 when a serious accident brought an end to my teaching exploits, but drew me more into the world of healing, therapies, and business. This led to our well-known specialisation in Insurance for Health & Well Being Professionals. I had decided to opt in to society and seriously focused on the family business full time around 1975. So I was juggling music, Yoga and business for some years.

The accident in 1977 was incorrectly treated by the NHS, leading to all sorts of long-term complications. As a result, my interest in natural therapy methods and lifestyle evolved strongly during the 70s and 80s and I trained as an Energy Healer. Yoga philosophy and techniques helped me through the traumas and pain I endured for many years.

Through my teaching and healing involvement, colleagues in the

therapy field asked me to become involved in setting up multi-therapy insurance for health professionals in 1990 which were not easily available then. We designed and pioneered cover that was previously only available to mainstream professionals. Since then we have evolved into a comprehensive organisation with sophisticated systems, over 55,000 clients and 36 staff. We like to think that as a company we are pulled by growth, not driven by it.

As a business leader, I have always felt it important to set a note embodying an ethos and philosophy. I believe that you have to lead by example and try and set the highest standards of behaviour. Business can be a vehicle for spiritual service and this idea has sustained me throughout my life's journey.

I still use meditation, healing precepts, techniques and Yoga related philosophy to deal with whatever challenges life throws at me, practically throughout my bus-y-ness days and also in my activities as a musician, teacher and composer. I always give thanks for the lineages and wisdom that helped me get and sustain my life on track! In my charitable work for the College of Healing and as trustee for a variety of other charities in Health and education, I try to bring Yogic principles whenever possible.

Insurance is about trust, relationships and good communication and those roots are essential to nourish the tree of any enterprise whether for profit or not for profit. Our Tree/Bridge symbol reflects the vision that I had for our company when I re-launched the business at a crossroads time of my life in the early 90s. I transformed it from a general commercial brokerage into something closer to my heart and life interests.

The Bridge symbol which I originally conceived in meditation, was a metaphor for linking different aspects of society and thought - the conventional with the unconventional, idealistic people with business realities, and conventional medical care with more natural approaches, some of which, as we know, have been around for thousands of years.

Above all, I see us acting as an information bridge and guide for therapists. We achieve this on a daily basis when we talk to clients, by offering information on our website and producing various documents for clients, plus articles and talks.

My lecturing and teaching activities are often about communication, self development and coaching people to learn how to be functional and effective in business as therapists. Having bridged that journey from a world outside of business to being firmly rooted in it, I can see both views and hopefully help others make that transition too.

Our tree has grown taller and stronger over the years and its roots form an important part of the landscape in our chosen specialty. Those roots, for me were firmly planted in the fertile soil of the spiritual philosophy I contacted all those years ago in India.

I still can't quite believe that the musician/Yoga teacher/energy healer would develop into a successful business leader with 2 fine sons to take the next generation forward! We are all on our life's journey and we all just walk one day at a time. Yoga philosophy teaches us to have a view of the big picture and a direction, but also to attend to detail and be in the moment and enjoy the landscape as one travels along.

Further details of Balens, from: www.balens.co.uk.