

Living An Authentic Life

And when you get the choice to sit it out or dance,

Dance....I hope you dance.

I hope you dance....I hope you dance.

I hope you dance....I hope you dance...

Time is a wheel in constant motion always rolling us along

Tell me who wants to look back

On their years and wonder

Where those years have gone

- Lee Ann Womack

As we made our way to meet David Sye, one of the foremost yoga teachers in the West, on Wednesday 31 January 2007, I became aware of a great exaltation of spirit. When I had phoned him a few days before to arrange an interview, I had been absolutely delighted that he could make himself available at such short notice and that he seemed so genuinely enthused about meeting us. As soon as we saw him, his engaging personality and openness dissipated any awkwardness we may have felt. It became obvious that we were in the presence of someone with an indomitable adventurous and resilient spirit, an innate sense of curiosity and wonder and an infectious exuberance for life. We all sensed his incredible aliveness and we were all witness to the ease with which he immersed himself totally in the present moment, paying total attention to what was going on. This was an encounter that promised to be meaningful, entertaining and thought-provocative.

There were no less than five of us (and from no less than three different continents!) that day sitting around a small table in a Spanish bar in the heart of London to talk about yoga, under the bemused eye of a young staff baffled by our request for soy milk...It became clear, right from the start, that David Sye is no conventional yogi but one who walks on the other side of conformism, and I laughed inwardly at the thought of how many other misperceptions and stereotypes would be challenged that morning! Once again, I was reminded how an insidious tendency for superficial categorization had prevented me from seeing things for what they truly are. One doesn't need to be in a temple or in an especially dedicated place to practice, live and breathe yoga or simply talk about it. To limit yoga to conform to certain received ideas is definitely not yoga.

There was nothing scripted in David Sye's words; they had the raw spontaneous quality of those who speak from the heart, giving them authenticity. He answered all our questions with an uncommon mix of wit, integrity and soul-searching honesty, giving us a glimpse of his deep interest in metaphysical and spiritual matters, and exhibiting simultaneously an analytical and intuitive mind. He walked us boldly through his personal life journey, sharing stories and revealing insights which have been integral to his ascent into consciousness and have allowed him to integrate the traumas of his early life.

"Yoga is my life but it is not all my life" he told us. Like many others, he came to yoga for health reasons. Before yoga, he had no life. With no fewer than seven tumours in his colon, the future looked bleak. The profound soul work of cathartic rebirthing (connected breathwork and focused awareness) led him to journey back into the subconscious wounded places of his body and mind, releasing self-sabotaging patterns. "The body has a memory. The body is a composite of what has gone in the life. Everything is written in the body" continued David Sye. It is the unresolved issues that are stored in our cellular memory which prevent us from moving forward. Until the stagnant energy is cleared away, we stay stuck in a given pattern and keep on recreating the same experience over and over again and we cannot expand in consciousness. To heal, we need to reclaim all the fragments of ourselves which have become dissociated so that we may become whole again. Anything that is suppressed, repressed or denied - consciously or unconsciously - interferes with the flow of energy in our bodies and manifests as illness. As people, we are fields of vibrating energy and healing occurs when harmonic resonance is restored in our own vibration. It is through accessing and using the power that lies within us that we are able to heal ourselves. David Sye explained how he had found the ancient science of using sound to promote healing very beneficial for him. The Tibetan yogis, he furthered, use the vibrations of the human voice whilst holding specific points to stimulate the flow of energy and restore harmonious balance. Every organ in the body vibrates to a certain sound and the colon, for instance, vibrates to the sound of the letter P. David Sye also mentioned his profound interest in energetic kinesiology and the potentials of using intent in a certain way to bring about transformation. Kinesiology enables us to by-pass the conscious mind to tap directly into the wisdom of our higher self. It allows us to bring our inner and outer world into finer alignment and serves to test the objective truth of a statement.

Illness awakens us more deeply to the preciousness and precariousness of our lives. By experiencing the transitory nature of each moment, we become more aware of our own physical finiteness. Knowing that our time is limited and that the time of our death is already set, David Sye added, we should seek to make the most of the time we have on earth and enjoy it to the full. Our lives are what we make them to be. What really matters is not how long we are here for but how intensely we live, what we do with our lives. "Life is blighted by two things: extraordinary ignorance and fear" explained David Sye. Those who have been close to death report how radically their attitude to life has been changed. In the face of death, all falls away, the expectations, the pride, the fear of failure, etc., to leave us with what really matters. Ill health enables us to go within and find out where we are resisting love, why we feel unable to give and receive love and accept the truth about ourselves. By developing a greater sense of self-acceptance and self-forgiveness, we can integrate all the different parts of ourselves and we can become peace itself. Everything that happens to us in this life is a gift to us even if we do not see it in the first place; everything has a potential growth to it. We are here to learn from the lessons we are given; this is what makes life interesting, challenging and fun. Life is a great adventure. We need to cultivate an element of "hunger" and "foolishness" in everything that we do. We need to keep a zest for living, a sense of play and curiosity and a willingness to learn from the mistakes we all inevitably make.

The way we nurture ourselves is our responsibility. "We must not trash the body too much". The body is the temple of the soul and should be treated and respected as such. David Sye talked about the importance of maintaining the body in optimum working order through the choices we make as regard food, exercise (asanas), cleansing and purification techniques (pranayama, meditation, kriyas - including

vasti kriyas -, massage) and sleep (even if this means taking a nap in the middle of the day because the body needs it). He also stressed the necessity of taking time out, time off, to relax and enjoy life and spoke about the importance of discipline – not discipline imposed from without but self-discipline motivated from within. David Sye explained that he gets up before dawn every day for his personal practice and that it is always a special moment for him to reconnect with himself and be still. “Yoga is about feeling good about ourselves. It enables us to go above the conscious ego, the ego that is programmed by society and to bust out. It’s the greatest high I know without taking recreational drugs” he continued. There are so many of us living our lives by accident, stumbling in and out of relationships, venturing into jobs, hoping to make money and stay in good health, forever searching for a sense of purpose and direction to become alive and find fulfillment only to realize (sometimes too late!) that we need to wake up first before our life can be a life of purpose. We need to shift from soulless living to soulful living. How long do we have to live until we realize that our ladder is propped up against the wrong wall? How long do we need to understand that we are worshipping the wrong values, living meaningless lives, chasing someone else’s dreams? We have silenced our own inner voice. “Finding out who we are should be intrinsic, there’s no need to go to India to find out who we are!” commented David Sye. We need to find out what it is that we are really aching for and then have the courage to follow our own heart. Once we know what resonates with us, we can align the way we live our life with our purpose. Living authentically means being free to choose to act and think in accordance with our conscience, it means following our own truth, using the gifts we have been given to serve our purpose.

The universe is undergoing a time of major transition and great spiritual awakening. We are now on the verge (some say it has already started) of a collective leap in the evolution of consciousness and an increasing number of people report feeling the effects of a higher vibration of light and experiencing more insights. This wave of light that is touching people’s hearts comes with the realization that spiritual growth can be a wonderful and joyful journey instead of a struggle! There now exists the possibility to move to the next evolutionary stage of mankind – from Homo sapiens to Homo spiritus as is experienced by the current shift in consciousness, pursued David Sye. Revolutionary research led by eminent scholars is bringing evidence that we are not separate but part of an infinite continuum and that all and everything is interconnected. “We can choose to play in it or not”, he added. “The term Homo spiritus refers to the awakened man who has bridged the evolutionary leap from physical to spiritual, from form to nonform, and from linear to nonlinear. The awakened man realizes that it is consciousness itself, which constitutes the core of the evolutionary tree in all its seemingly stratified and evermore complex expressions as the evolution of life. Thus, life transforms from the relatively unconscious linear to the fully conscious nonlinear, and Creation reveals itself to be the ongoing unfolding of the Unmanifest becoming Manifest. The capacity to reach the condition or state classically called Enlightenment represents the fulfillment of the potential of consciousness in its evolutionary progression.” – David Hawkins. The way we perceive ourselves in relation to the rest of the world reflects our current level of consciousness. As we progress in awareness, we move from lower to higher thought-form frequencies, gradually releasing all that is undermining us, all the “toxic stuff” as David Sye refers to it. As can be tested by kinesiology, there are now in the world people presenting an uncommonly high level of energy – the result of an opening of the chakras to receive the universal energy (kundalini) which comes with an innate knowledge of how to harness and channel this energy. These people

experience heightened sensitivity, a deeper degree of acceptance and respect for all life forms together with a strong acknowledgement of interdependence of all things.

When I asked David Sye about the greatest influence in his life as a yoga teacher, he replied without any hesitation how his life had been happily changed by Clara Buck, a most accomplished yoga master and disciple of the great BKS Iyengar. He spoke with the greatest respect and the fondest admiration about this great Dame of yoga who never apologized for who she was and who embodied the very same quality he values above all, that of authenticity. He even declined the honour that K. Pattabhi Jois had bestowed upon him of traveling to India to study with him in person to stay in London and learn from Clara Buck's teachings. His journey into yoga also led him to travel to India and America as well as various places in Europe, allowing him to meet many well-known yogis such as David Svenson, Erich Schiffmann, Shandor Remete and Angela Farmer, to name but a few. Although he studied many different styles of yoga under many different teachers, he never felt the need to stay with one in particular; this led him to develop his own fluid and organic form - **Yogabeats**.

Yogabeats classes are always accompanied by an eclectic mix of ethnic/world fusion music – compiled by David Sye himself - because he strongly believes that music has this undeniable ability of putting us in the now. "Music helps us find implicit order inside explicit disorder. We can feel stillness within the music; music helps us find silence inside", he explained. There is rhythm in music and in life. A life devoid of rhythm becomes dull, mechanical and lifeless. Like life itself, David Sye's classes are utterly unpredictable, constantly evolving from the merging of everyone's energies and are always infused with a strong sense of playfulness (lila), inspiring creative expression. Since the time when he worked in wartime Serbia and experienced first-hand how loud rhythmic music had drowned the sound of falling artillery during the yoga classes he ran for the soldiers, music has always been an integral part of all his classes.

David Sye does not want an easy life. Challenges provide true opportunities to learn and grow and once we begin to change our attitude towards the difficulties we encounter in our lives, they can become interesting and fun. Yoga is not something that we do; it is something that we are. Yoga is a way of being, it is pure awareness. It changes our perceptions and shapes the way we interact with everything and everyone. Sometimes we have to go against the flow to be true to our Self and live up to our highest ethical values. This often requires that we step out of our familiar comfort zones and follow our inner guidance, not giving in to outside pressure. For a long time, David Sye had to contend with criticism from the British Wheel of Yoga and their shift towards a more positive attitude is only recent.

Having integrity means that we walk the talk and that we have the confidence and courage to say no. "It takes a lot of courage to release the familiar and seemingly secure, to embrace the new. But there is no real security in what is no longer meaningful. There is more security in the adventurous and exciting, for in movement there is life, and in change there is power." - Alan Cohen. Releasing what we have but no longer serves us or is no longer true to our heart is an act of courage. David Sye admitted having a hard time getting over from the recent break-up of a six and a half year-long relationship; though the wounds are still raw and the pain tangible, he has however managed to put the past behind him and is now moving on. Life is made up of constant walking away from people and opportunities which at one time seemed attractive. David Sye stands strong in what he believes and will not be swayed to compromise for the wrong reasons, he will not be snared in the net of

name and fame. He mentioned for instance how he could not find it in his heart to stay in California where everyone is a nobody unless they are famous and where gurus such as Guru Frawley feel the need to print guru on their cards! On another occasion, he told us how he turned down a lucrative offer to appear in a McDonald's advertisement for a salad bar, even though the money would have been extremely welcome to fund his projects...

As well as a dedicated yogi with twenty-two years of teaching behind him, I found David Sye to be a visionary, a peace activist, a compassionate listener, and a strong voice for global change through yoga. His incisive humour, piercing insights and playful irreverence concealed a much deeper-rooted concern for the happiness and welfare of all human beings. The central thrust of his work is to promote a sense of oneness, bridging different ethnic, faith and cultural communities, celebrating our diversity and differences instead of letting them tear us apart. Unity is not uniformity. There is unity within diversity. It is a sad fact of modern living, he went on, that we are losing our identity; individuality is thwarted or denied and is being replaced by conformism and monoculture of the mind. All peoples should be allowed to celebrate their differences and work out their own destinies. It is not because we are different that we cannot get on, poverty of spirit is an attitude that prevents us from acknowledging that we are of one community. No one should be considered any "less human" or "less worthy" of life, because of their race, gender or creed, added David Sye. At this point in the conversation he also briefly evoked his interest in Sufism. Sufism advocates liberation from dogmas and preconceived ideas and transcends the barriers of religion. Sufis believe that there is only one Truth but several interpretations of it. It is the way that we perceive our differences that needs to be addressed by promoting mutual respect and understanding and an acceptance of the intrinsic worth of every human being.

David Sye has joined the people of goodwill who believe in the fundamental freedom of the human spirit and who entirely respect that we can all be and act according to our own conscience. By beginning to take active steps to create peace in our own life, that of our community and the wider world, we participate in humanity's awakening consciousness. We use our talents and skills and the gift of our human life to make the world a better place. This means that if we are a yoga teacher, we should try and be the best teacher we can possibly be. We can be mighty in our small peaceful ways. Peace is an every day choice that has far-reaching effects. When we find peace within our hearts, we begin to inspire peace to those around us. As the vibration of light that we are now experiencing on our planet becomes stronger, we have the potential of growing more rapidly and clear our karma from the past.

David Sye's yoga is a yoga of action and commitment. He strongly believes that there is no distinction between what is good for him and what is good for the rest. His strong sense of empathy for all people led him to adopt a Serbian name – despite his Russian origin – whilst he was in Serbia. By bringing yoga to places of conflicts, he can convey his plea for peace. His purpose is not to teach the advanced postures he has mastered himself and show superiority but to share the gift of yoga with those who desperately need it in the hope that their hearts too will be touched by its transforming grace. Yoga helps us to move beyond what we perceive ourselves to be, yoga allows us to transcend the day-to-day drama of our lives; yoga makes us humble and respectful, yoga enables us to go deeper and deeper into our own being until, ultimately, we can reach infinite consciousness. Already as a result of David Sye's efforts to date, wounds are beginning to heal and genuine bonds are being

developed in communities around the world. The women inmates at Bronzefield prison in Middlesex where he teaches yoga classes report that yoga is helping them find meaning in their lives, providing them with the welcome physical relief their neglected bodies crave for and bringing them to a safe and supportive place to nurture themselves. Yoga is enabling them to see that violence is hurtful to others and to themselves and is providing them with a way of changing their aggressive and hostile behaviour for a more peaceful one; yoga promotes self-confidence, self-worth, a sense of belonging and a sense of community. In yoga, they discover a way to reclaim their dignity and freedom; yoga empowers them to make positive choices. At the end of each yoga class, they always leave feeling "exhausted and totally blissed-out" commented David Sye.

David Sye is also putting a lot of efforts into a London project which supports the needs and interests of deprived London teenagers involved in prostitution, crack addiction, gun culture, etc. These youths see in violence a means of asserting control, temporarily numbing their feelings of fear and insecurity in the process. David Sye is hoping to reach out to these teenagers who have fallen through the net through yoga, bringing them to another level of consciousness in which violence is not the solution to violence. Violence can only exist in a context of fear. When we remove the roots of violence - the rising tensions - , violence loses its *raison d'être*. Global violence can only come to an end through raising the global level of consciousness. Opposing violence will only lead to more violence, it is not the solution. Violence can only end when global consciousness has reached the point where unconditional love has become stronger than fear. This comes through forgiveness. As more and more people expand in consciousness, others are inspired to do the same. When we extend ourselves for others, we are serving them. This way we fulfill our fundamental universal purpose in life which is to make a positive difference in the lives of others through service.

We fear what we do not understand and fear perpetuates violence. Everything that we feed will grow. As we develop in awareness, we begin to understand that if we water the seed of violence in our hearts, it will keep on growing stronger and that if we water the seed of compassion in our hearts, it will keep on growing stronger as well. It all depends on what we want to manifest. Even though more and more people are now awakening to this reality, they choose to do nothing, hoping that the feeling of "uncomfortability" will eventually fade away. David Sye feels a strong sense of responsibility for helping solve some of the major problems in the world. Whatever affects us affects others and whatever affects others affects us too. David Sye has taken up a pressing cause for concern, that of peace and reconciliation between the people of Israel and Palestine. Suffering can only cease when we change the way we think and feel about each other. Violence is born out of a mind that is full of hatred. The practice of ahimsa (non-violence) establishes in us an attitude of universal love. We all want peace and the way to peace is peace itself. In times of fundamental insecurity, we all need to learn to cultivate the spirit of the peaceful warrior and embody the quality of compassion. Feelings of brotherhood and sisterhood become possible when love, balance, harmony, cooperation and inter-connectedness enter into our daily living. David Sye is strongly committed to developing the involvement of women in peace building initiatives. He is hoping that yoga will enable these women to resolve their differences on fundamental issues, no longer seeing them as a source of contention and violence, but as a catalyst for transformation. Yoga is empowering them to discover that they can make a difference in the peace process and that peace begins with each and every one of them. When we can step beyond the illusion of aloneness, helplessness and

separateness superimposed from the outside we become aware of our likeness for "we are the same, we separate ourselves with the concept of culture" stressed David Sye. He also told us how he never fails to be deeply moved at the sight of these women, who spontaneously find themselves hugging each other, weeping tears on each other's shoulders after each session. This makes all the hard work and danger he exposes himself to in a country at war entirely worthwhile.

Everything that David Sye does in the Middle East is entirely funded by him personally. All his classes are entirely **FREE** and represent an entirely benevolent initiative with a passion to serve and share. The suffering endured by the Palestinian and Israeli people is real and has been going on for much too long. As we grow more compassionate towards all sentient beings, we cannot but wish for them to be free from whatever plight they are in but this wish is meaningless unless it is followed by individual and collective action for universal welfare. "We must become the change we want to see" – Gandhi. The considerable benefits that Palestinian and Israeli women are experiencing through practicing yoga together have brought to the fore the absolute urgency of developing a yoga teacher training program in a part of the world that so desperately needs it. **Yogabeats'** first teacher training for Palestinians will be held at Reidman College in Israel in October 2007 and David Sye is now concentrating all his efforts at getting this very special project off the ground. However, he cannot single-handedly fund this project and is appealing for monetary donations. If you would like to make a positive difference in the world, please listen to his plea and donate whatever you can towards "**Yogabeats conflict**". For more information about this project or to make a contribution, please contact carol@yogabeats.com or david@yogabeats.com. Yogabeats website is www.yogabeats.com

Out beyond ideas of rightdoing
and wrongdoing,
there is a field.
I'll meet you there.
When the soul lies down in that grass,
the world is too full to talk about.
Ideas, language,
even the phrase 'each other'
doesn't make any sense."
-Rumi

This article by **Sabine Halifax** first appeared in March 2007 on the website of the on-line yoga magazine, www.yoga-live.co.uk