

Talking Shop with John Scott

The popular British yoga teacher shares his connection to Ashtanga Yoga and his teacher, Sri K. Pattabhi Jois.

By Heather Elton



Ex-golfer-windsurfer-industrial designer-turned-yogi, John Scott was introduced to Ashtanga by Derek Ireland and first visited Pattabhi Jois in Mysore in 1989. Scott, now one of England's most popular Ashtanga teachers, is the author of Ashtanga Yoga and stars in his Ashtanga Yoga Primary Series DVD.

Yoga Journal: How did you come to yoga?

John Scott: My first real yoga was playing golf. It's about being at one—reading the field, knowing just where you want to place the ball, and being the ball. If your focus is right there, you do not see anything else but the field.

YJ: Tell me about your first teacher.

JS: Derek Ireland was an English footballer with a fantastic physique and amazingly long hamstrings. He inspired me with his persona, energy, inner beauty, and enthusiasm. He opened the door to yoga for me.

YJ: What was your first visit to Mysore like?

JS: On the first day, I practiced through to Parsvottanasana [the first few basic asanas of the standing sequence] and came up dizzy. It was very intense practicing under the watchful eye of Guruji [Jois]. He looked at me and said, "You take Padmasana." From that day onward, Guruji has taken me pose by pose through the Ashtanga sequences. I've been stopped and held at particular places in the sequences for months. I remember being stuck on Marichyasana B, crying about the pain in my ankle, but ultimately learning that "form follows function," acknowledging that my ankles needed to open up more and finding a greater range of motion.

YJ: Tell me about your practice.

JS: I'll start my first day of the week with Second Series, then the rest of the week will be Third Series and my little bit of Fourth, and then I'll finish the week off on Friday with the Primary Series. However, being a householder with many responsibilities, something may present itself that requires immediate attention, and I will have to sacrifice my practice. If I can fit in the Surya Namaskars, then I will. I don't feel guilty if I miss a practice because I know tomorrow is another day.

YJ: How has Jois influenced your teaching?

JS: All my yoga learning comes from the seat of Guruji's work, but my inner flower is different from Guruji's because of my cultural background. I don't have the Hindu

trappings. In fact, my family had no religion, and for a long time I had no religious beliefs. "God" was not a word in my vocabulary. So it has taken me a while to come round to thinking, When I'm inhaling, I'm connecting to God. Guruji says, "Inhalation is God moving into you. Exhalation you move toward God."

YJ: How has yoga changed your life?

JS: Yoga has given me a key to the way inside myself, a connection to the spiritual world, a connection to universal energy emanating from our very core.

YJ: When Jois says, "Do your practice and all is coming," what is coming?

JS: Jois is saying that all that is coming is Self-realization, a direct communion with God. It is about the understanding, not the enlightenment. Enlightenment is a result of knowing. To be at one with something is the realization of that, and, click, the light suddenly goes on.

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