

## On Guru Yoga

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From time immemorial and in various civilizations, the transmission of sacred traditions has been essentially oral (and in some cases ritualistic and mimetic). In the Yoga tradition, the guru-chela relationship developed into a crucial factor in promulgating knowledge and wisdom. Taking into consideration the disciple's genuine motivation for entering into such an unwritten, timeless agreement, the guru would preside over a very personal alliance, which was essentially spiritual and always characterized by mutual respect and affection.

In spirituality (as evidenced from the traditions of Ancient India down even into today's emancipated world), the presence of the Guru (spiritual guide) is perceived as indispensable in virtually all forms of Yoga *sadhana*. In Yoga, the link established between the disciple and the teacher is the bedrock of a sacred relationship called Guru Yoga.

Guru Yoga is not a school of thought of its own, but rather a traditional practice occurring in various Yoga systems. It is characterized both by the conveyance of spiritual knowledge on the part of the Guru and by loyal obedience, truthfulness and fidelity on the part of the disciple. In contemporary India (and other countries where Yoga is earnestly studied and practiced), there is a well-anchored tradition that Guru's guidance and blessings are necessary to promote one's success. These immaterial boons are indispensable to the authentic process of Yoga.

During my long studies and practice at the feet of Shri Shyam Sundar Goswami, an authentic Yoga master who embodied Ancient India's highest ideals, I noticed that even Western *sadhaks* and *sadhikas* were able to discover the beauty and sacredness of Guru Yoga.

Accepting a spiritual teacher as one's Guru starts by attentive listening to his (or her) authoritative discourses. As a rule, such discourses will elicit reflections or feelings from the ambitious pupil, which will motivate selfimprovement. Intellectual curiosity and regular attendance from the pupil may then develop into a genuine need to reach out to cultivate awareness of and access to deeper dimensions of life. This may be strongly boosted when coupled with dedicated practice of yogic vitalizing processes.

The role of a Guru is not merely to impart intellectual knowledge or techniques to students. Guru Yoga entails a fully assumed moral and spiritual responsibility on the part of the Guru, as well as an attitude of gratitude on the part of the pupil in being given instructions and advice. However, to be able to accept the Guru's advice and meet possible demands without losing one's integrity, the dedicated disciple will have to analyze his or her own prejudices and be prepared to correct wrong attitudes. Both the teacher and the disciple are then expected to keep up a highly refined and sensitive level of contact.

In many cases, the teacher's discourses may rouse deep feelings of admiration, gratitude and affection, thus providing an impetus for seeking to realize ones dormant potentialities. When this is the case (which generally follows a long relationship), a different relationship may then emerge, wherein intellectual understanding is enriched by the tangible experience of a sacred link with the teacher. This development may result in the student wanting to become his Guru's faithful devotee. In such a metamorphosis, the devotee will actually perceive the teacher not as merely an ordinary human whose vocation is to teach, but as a living spiritual reality which transcends human aspects. Under such optimal conditions, the teacher-disciple relationship may be kept at an extraordinarily high level of subtlety, in many cases even after the teacher's demise.

The following off-hand record in Sri Goswami's apartment illustrates the level of sensitiveness in guru-disciples relationship. It occurred in the mid 70s, at the end of a lecture that preceded a special Yoga class:

*"It's not good that we should worry about the next class. We should be able to talk freely without such a time limit and this kind of worry. This talk comes from and goes to you. It's not good to stop and cut it vertical.*

*"Whether you know it or not, you interact with me, you actually project into me. It's not what you say or do or think here, it's more direct, it's your at-man. I can see it and you mostly have got it. This makes me talk freely. Ah, I wonder if your understand all this ..."*

I also learned from my long experience and observations, from the Yoga master who gradually became my spiritual father, about the difficulty of evaluating people, especially outstanding persons, and their behavior by merely relying on our past experiences, intuition or intellect as the only criteria. In attempting to rely on these common means of evaluation, we may be easily misled and, in turn, mislead others.

There was much prejudice, indeed, that ran in my teacher's audience (distinguished as that audience may have been) with regards to his seemingly rude and sometimes unconventional behavior. Not everyone was prepared to look beyond their own culture, likes and dislikes and preconceived notions of values, or what in their judgment might have seemed unspiritual.

It is a challenge – one might even call it a “token of affection” – to overlook the Guru's human shortcomings when embarking upon the journey to discover the hidden beauty of Guru Yoga. Meeting exceptional beings, such as authentic Gurus or inspiring yogis, is a rare privilege in ones life.

Love is undoubtedly the most precious gift given to mankind. Like true friendship, it must be cultivated. Pure as diamond, Guru Yoga is the luminous and timeless expression of a love that challenges Time.

*Edited by Jim Earles*