

ON TEACHERS AND TEACHING

It is relatively easy to be a teacher of an academic subject, but to be a teacher in art is very difficult, and to be a yoga teacher is the hardest of all, because yoga teachers have to be their own critics and correct their own practice. The art of yoga is entirely subjective and practical. Yoga teachers have to know the entire functioning of the body; they have to know the behaviour of the people who come to them and how to react and be ready to help, to protect and safeguard their pupils.

The requisites of a teacher are many, but I would like to give a few words for you all to catch, understand and work on. Later you can discover many more. The teacher should be clear, clever, confident, challenging, caring, cautious, constructive, courageous, comprehending, creative, completely devoted and dedicated to knowing the subject, considerate, conscientious, critical, committed, cheerful, chaste and calm. Teachers must be strong and positive in their approach. They must be affirmative to create confidence in the pupils, and negative within themselves so that they can reflect critically on their own practice and attitudes. Teachers must always be learning. They will learn from their pupils and must have the humility to tell them that they are still learning their art.

The relationship between teacher and pupil is like that between husband and wife, and like that between father and son. It is a very full and complex relationship. As in the relationship between husband and wife, which is one of closeness, teachers must ardently strive to see that their pupils do not fall, and to help them throughout their practice. At the same time, as between a father and a grown-up son, though

there is relationship there is also distance. The job of the teacher is to protect and guide the pupils so that they may not fall from the path they have to tread. And the pupils' job is to see that what they have been given is maintained so that they do not slip into their own pitfalls. There is a two-way avenue between pupil and teacher involving love, admiration, devotion and dedication.

I remember very well that when India was under the power of England and France, Indians who had visited Europe used to put a notice in their houses proclaiming 'France returned' or 'England returned' as if they were extraordinary and privileged persons. The same thing is happening now in yoga. Students from the West come to India and 'India returned' yogīs are teaching yoga all over the place. It is indeed unfortunate that people take courses for a short while, then proclaim themselves to be yoga teachers. God alone knows how much experience they have or what is the quality of their work. People who go to them are also responsible because they do not put pressure on the teacher to find out whether the teacher has knowledge or not. Pupils also should have eagle eyes to watch their teachers.

Today, many people call themselves gurus, yogīs or yoginīs. This is wrong. Teachers should not be called gurus, and gurus are not to be seen merely as teachers. A guru is one who removes darkness and gives light. One who protects his or her pupils always so that they may not become victims of circumstances, and makes them work more and more so that they develop humility, is a guru. The role of the guru is to act as a bridge. Having experienced the truth, the guru is there as a bridge to help other towards God. The guru is an instrument of God, whose power moves in him or her, to shake those who do not yet understand the spiritual value of life, and to bring them nearer to God.

To live spiritually is to live in the present moment. When you are practising, as long as no other thoughts come to you, for that much time you are spiritual. The moment your mind wanders elsewhere, maybe to a person you have seen on the

street, or to something somebody said to you in the office, then even if you are practising yoga at that moment, it is what is going on in your mind that is important, not what you are doing.

Yoga gives firmness of body, clarity of intelligence, cleanliness of heart. That is peace, and by looking at that peace, others will learn. Cultivate that supreme strength of peace, joy and delight. Then others, seeing the joy in you, will say, 'I want to enjoy too.' You are a true helper of society when the pupil comes to you, instead of you going to him. Then it is a pure teaching and a pure message.

In my method of teaching, because I take you through a lot of poses, I keep you for two or three hours, or sometimes four hours, without allowing your mind to go elsewhere. Those who have worked with me have all experienced this. When I take a class for three and a half or four hours, do the pupils



know that four hours have passed? No. So I have kept them in a spiritual state for four hours. If, out of twenty-four hours, they remain spiritual for four hours, I can say I have done some good in this world!

Suppose I were to ask you to do a meditation, to close your eyes and remain in silence, and suppose I also were to close my eyes. Could I know what was going on in your mind? Perhaps you would call that spiritual, but I would say there is no spirituality there because your mind will be wandering elsewhere. That is not my method of teaching. I teach externally, but in doing so I am keeping your internal organs in a state of single-pointed awareness for four hours at a stretch. So I don't need a certificate to say whether this is physical yoga or spiritual yoga. When I am teaching I know that for four hours your mind has not been allowed to wander. And when I teach I make you full—fully aware of your body, your mind, your senses and your intelligence.

I am very active in the classes I give. Does that mean I am not meditating? You may meditate sitting in a corner, but I am moving everywhere and I am meditating. What is the difference between the two? Sitting in a corner and closing the eyes is not necessarily meditation—it may be just emptiness. Some people say I am a physical man because I touch my pupils' bodies to correct them when I am teaching and ask them to stretch here or to stretch there. Yet at the same time I am aware inside and I am aware outside. As you sit with your eyes closed, you are aware inside but you are not aware outside. I too see within, but I also see outside with the same light. Otherwise, how could I correct so many people when I am teaching? If they make mistakes, I go immediately to correct them. So I am integrated when I am teaching fifty people or three hundred people. When one becomes completely integrated, that is meditation. How can I not be meditating when I know three hundred people's mistakes?

But when you close your eyes and say you are meditating, you don't even know your own mistakes. I could simply sit there saying, 'Do it this way. Do it that way,' but that would

be creating a polarity between my pupils and myself. Instead, if the pupils are going wrong, I go and correct them, because they also should see the light that I have seen.

Now I don't mind finding fault with my own pupils who are teaching. Sometimes I give classes with fifty or sixty people. Thirty to thirty-five of them may be teachers and the rest students. When I look at them for a few minutes, I can see that they are teaching without practice. I am talking about my own pupils now, so you should appreciate what I am saying. When that happens, the first thing I do is to give them what you might call shock treatment. When the teachers say that they are not practising but nevertheless know what they are doing, I tell them that they should stop teaching if they do not practise for themselves. In the West, people go to classes without ever testing the calibre of the teacher. As the master tests the pupils, so too the pupils should test the teachers' standards before accepting them as teachers. A medical man cannot give medicine without undergoing proper training. So the pupils must give medicine to their teachers if they know that their standards are not up to the right level. This is known as an ethical discipline. Teaching with practice is ethical, but it is unethical when teachers teach without clarity in their postures.

Yoga cannot be learnt through lectures. Yoga has to be taught by precept, and in teaching, practical things are involved. It is very easy for pupils to find out whether the teacher is good or not. I cannot blame the teachers, but I blame the people who go to them without judging the standard. The moment the pupils start judging, the teachers will come to know that they are observed. This will make them realize how little they know and they will practise more and probably become good teachers. So I leave it to the students to decide.

There is very little value in teachers' certificates. The value is in the teacher's way of approaching teaching. The world is pure; ātman is pure, but unfortunately the people living in the world are very corrupt. As yoga became more popular in the West, many people started teaching yoga, claiming to teach

the Iyengar method. Some used my name, and unfortunately still use it, to teach things which I myself never taught. When yoga came to be taught officially in England under the auspices of the Education Authorities, many people applied to be accepted as teachers, claiming that they had been trained by me, when this was not so. When the Authorities discovered that some of these teachers' methods were different from mine, they wanted assurance that teachers employed by them were indeed trained by me or by my senior pupils. This is why I introduced certificates for teachers, so that a uniform system could be maintained and so that no confusion might arise through one method of teaching being mixed with another. Through the certificates, at least you know who are my genuine students who have trained directly under me. Beyond this, the certificate has no special value. If teachers want to go further in their education in their chosen field, they can go on to get advanced certificates, as in other fields of education. But if you are happy with your primary education, be content with it. If you want to continue with secondary education, be content with that also. If you want to go on to do a PhD or even more, then that is up to you, but the important thing is not the certificate. What is important is whether you are sincere, whether you are humble, whether you are compassionate. You have to be compassionate as well as merciless. The two have to go together, but you must know where to be compassionate and where not to be compassionate in order to help the pupils with their problems.

If you are a teacher, do not go beyond the frontier of your knowledge. If pupils are overstretching, or if you do not know, then tell them you are the one who is teaching, and they should follow you. In this way, you can lead your pupils at a speed which you are sure of. Then you will get confidence. *Yoga* is a soothing thing. Even if I know the soothing action of a pose when I perform it, I also know the excruciating action it may have for you. In *naṭarājāsana*, for example, I know how to relax even in the stretch, but my students don't know how to. They experience fatigue. They do not allow the energy to flow. They block the energies in order to get the pose, and then they call it overstretch. I call it understretch. You all

overstretch the brain and understretch the body. The tension and fatigue in that instance are in the brain. People tire first in the brain. The body takes longer. You should know which kind of fatigue it is.

The pupils who work so hard and so desperately in a pose that they become hard and tense are doing the āsana compartmentally. They do not know how to stretch evenly everywhere. If you overstretch on one side, that means you are dehydrating that part. You may be a beginner teacher, and you may have advanced pupils, but this need not be a problem. Who is to measure the overstretch? Overstretch means excruciating pain. The fatigue in the overstretched part comes immediately; it does not come afterwards. If there is no pain when you think you are overstretching, then it is only a mental block. You think, 'I am overstretching; I should not overstretch,' and it is that very thought which prevents you from going further in the presentation of the āsana.

When my body is tired, I say my body is tired; I never say that I am tired. If my brain is tired, I do halāsana and get back the energy, and if my body is tired, I do half halāsana and rejuvenate the cells. Maybe when you are tired, you do standing poses. You are already tired and then you overstretch in the standing poses, so naturally you get even more tired. You should use your discrimination—what to do, how much to do, and when to do it.

Now I shall ask you a question. When should a teacher end the class? If you are a teacher, when should you tell your students "That is enough for today"? Everybody knows how to begin, but nobody knows how to end the class. It is important to know exactly when to end. If the pupils can't take more than I have asked, I say to them, 'Stop!' This is how I bring the class to an end. You may think a person has got tremendous energy, but you should know when he cannot proceed further. Do you look at the pupils' skin when they came into the class, to see what colour it is, and then again when they leave the class, what the colour is, and in between, what the colours are and what changes and transformations take place?

As a teacher, do you observe all these things? I can say by looking at the skin that this person or that person cannot take it. The art of teaching is also to know when to stop. If you know when you have to make the pupil stop, then I can say you are a mature teacher. It is not a question of what you are giving. Perhaps you are giving a great deal because you want to build up a personality cult, or because you are afraid to stop.

And without innovation you cannot become an excellent teacher. Some bodies may have a long neck. Some may have a short neck. Some bodies may have a very narrow chest at the top and broad at the bottom. Others may be broad-chested at the top and narrow at the bottom. The spine may be very strong, or the spine may be very weak. And I have seen people who are tremendously intelligent, but with no connection to their body.

By coming into contact with people and knowing their emotional disturbances, I learn the poses which give emotional stability. I learn what exercises and what type of āsanas work on the liver, what works on the spleen, what works on the kidney, what works on the heart. I work on my own to discover how to stretch the liver, how to contract it, how to give lateral movement to the liver or to the stomach or to the intestine. This is how I have learned, and this is how I continue to learn. So I also have to be a creator at the time of teaching.

There are two types of teaching. One is explaining according to your intelligence. The other is knowing the weakness of your pupils, and how you have to explain in order for them to understand your meaning. That demands creativity. I have developed both kinds of teaching: I can give from my brain, and I can also receive the weakness of their brains and bodies and introduce a new style in order to make them understand and do well. That is the secret of my teaching.

When I was young—when society did not respect me at all—I was a pessimist. People called me a madman. But now, over fifty years of trials and errors have brought me to the

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point where I have clarity in what I am doing and in what I am teaching. Human failures there will be. Even greatly evolved people have made mistakes. I have taught many spiritual people in this world: scientists, artists, philosophers, saints, scholars. Do you think I do not learn from them? I am still a learner.

The first thing for a teacher to remember is that all the pupils who stand in his presence are as important as himself. Those who have trained under me become my children. Now my problem is how my children are going to look after my grandchildren!