

Advice to Yoga Teachers

by Swami Durgananda

Extracts from a Yoga Teachers' Meeting held at the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centre Madrid in 1997.

As a yoga teacher, your primary activity is to teach Asanas and Pranayama, but what you are really giving to the students is wisdom and spirituality. At first, they come to you to learn the postures and the breathing, but subconsciously they come for wisdom. Finally, when they're ready for it, you will also be ready to teach them the mantras and their meanings. Then you will realise that you know yoga from back to front. However, the foremost occupation is to teach Asanas and Pranayama. We must give the students something to do. The students cannot just look at statues all the time or sit like a holy person.

Swamiji taught us in this way so that new people can begin to enter into a very deep knowledge. That knowledge is the wisdom or universal understanding about how we are related to the Truth. It isn't even necessary to speak about this when we teach the Asanas. The students ask you how to practise this or that exercise and all you need to do is simply teach them the way you learned it. We have taught you the way we learned from Swamiji. This is a very correct way, and you should stick to it. At the same time, you must keep the wisdom alive within yourself through your own spiritual practices. With time and experience, you will find that students will come.

Swamiji made yoga teachers out of you so that you practise. I am still here because I was given the responsibility to teach, and that same responsibility lies also with you. If you teach in a very detached way, without identifying yourself with the knowledge, you will become a pure instrument. That purity is carrying you and often you are not even aware of it. The idea in yoga is to go through life in the purest way possible; this is the main support when there are obstacles on your way.

We cannot say one thing and then do something else; the students see through this. They will say, "Oh, the Swami is going to the disco every night, and then she is going to that butcher shop in front of the Cortes Ingles Shopping Mall where all those hams are hanging from the ceiling. Do you know that shop?" If I would go there to eat all those things, you would not be sitting here.

You would not feel that purity, that support behind what I say. If I tell you, “Don’t eat meat!” or “Don’t listen to loud music!”, but then in the evening I go with my big belly and eat ham and dance in the disco, you would not be touched by what I tell you.

That is why Swamiji made yoga teachers out of you. You must always remember this; it will give you a lot of strength. The idea to train you as yoga teachers came out of a vision. It didn’t come from the intellect deciding to create a new profession to make money. It came out of a vision for peace. This is the reason why it is such a blessed activity. So many people have come to our courses from around the world. More than 10,000 people have graduated in the Yoga Teachers' Training Course since 1969. This is not because we are better than others. It is because we have the blessing of the divine vision of our Master, Swami Sivananda. None of us do it to make money, this is not our goal. Otherwise, we would do it differently. We would go to a nice hotel with all the modern comforts. Were you comfortable at the Ashram in Canada? You usually have a backache the first night, then you get used to it. But there are yoga teachers who teach in hotels because they want to make money. Otherwise, nobody will come. They have a weekend in one place, and then another weekend somewhere else. All the while they are counting the money. During the week they watch TV, eat snacks and then go dancing.

We all have a tendency to be a little naïve in our efforts to teach yoga, and we forget that the Sivananda Yoga Teachers' Training Course came out of that vision which Swamiji had in Nassau, Bahamas: In his vision the whole world was on fire, everybody was running. Today, everybody IS running. Have you noticed? We are all running. We hear of an earthquake in Italy, a flood in Acapulco, bombs in Colombia. Look what happened in Israel. A big bomb exploded just 500 metres from our Centre. We have all heard the news. Sometimes it is better to avoid the news. I learned not to avoid them, but to look. I am not looking at the news because I am bored. I am looking in order to NOT avoid the reality.

We are still alright for the moment, we are somehow protected. But when you look at the map, we see that it is purely for karmic reasons that we are untouched by this fire. But the Maya (illusion) says, “Oh, we are OK, so the rest of the world cannot be on fire.” But this is not true. After this vision, Swamiji was wondering what he could do. What can one man do? “Nothing!”, we say. “Oh no, I can’t do much. I am not into politics and, even so, what good would that do?”

Swamiji asked, “What can I do?” He then remembered what Swami Sivananda was doing. He remembered his Guru. What did Swami Sivananda do? He was one man only, he was a one-man show. He did not have many disciples. He simply went to the other side of the Ganges, sat down and started meditating, practising Asanas, Pranayama and the yogic purification techniques. He was always smiling. When people would ask, “How do you do this?” He would reply, “Well, just come and live with me!”

Swami Vishnudevananda also wanted to know who this man was who had said, “An ounce of practice is better than tonnes of theory.” One day he found these words on a piece of paper in the waste basket and he wanted to know who this man was. So he went to Sivananda Ashram at Rishikesh, Himalayas. He then saw that Master Sivananda was only teaching what he was practising. He was teaching a teachers’ training course, which he called the Yoga Vedanta Forest Academy. After going through this training you knew everything about yoga, like during our four-week yoga teachers’ training course.

Swamiji remembered what his Master did, and then decided to do the same. This was the beginning of the Teachers’ Training Course. You see what a pure motive he had? It was simply to bring peace to each individual. Because if you are peaceful, your husband is peaceful, the children are peaceful. Because the family is peaceful, you can do business correctly – there is no greed, no anger, no jealousy. There will be a peaceful environment, and that peace will spread from person to person. Like the molecules, like the cells splitting and multiplying. One person can touch thousands of people. And that was the idea. This is one of his biggest missions for peace that anyone has done for this world.

If you think of those things when you teach, you will carry this spirituality within your being. Spirituality means you are not just thinking of yourself, but you are thinking of others. If you do that, you will be an excellent yoga teacher. Of course, you will have to see whether what you teach is really pure or not. That is to say, “Are you teaching yoga the way you learned it?” If the answer is “yes”, then you will feel the grace of the Masters and you will be a very effective teacher. You deserve the Nobel Peace Prize if you teach in this way, because you want to carry on the peace of the world in the midst of the fire. However nobody will recognise you. This is why Swamiji said that the highest yoga is “Bear insult, bear injury.” Because nobody really

knows what you are doing. Everybody will think that you are just a yoga teacher. But you are more than that. You are not just teaching how to do the Surya Namaskar.

There is so much commercial yoga everywhere, but what you have learned is something much deeper. You have learned to serve others and not to be attached to the fruit of your actions. That is why Swamiji asked that you study the Bhagavad Gita. He did not do this to make a Hindu out of you, nor did he do this so that you would become a professor of eastern philosophy. He did it so that you understand what Karma is. If you are attached to the fruits of your actions you won't find peace, because you are accumulating Agami Karma, which means that you will have to start all over again. Who wants to do this?

The spirit of the peace movement is to give and to give. If somebody gives you something and you know they want something in return, you are not so happy about it. For example, some neighbour gives you a big bouquet of flowers, and you know when they are on vacation you will have to water their flowers. It is all right, but some attachment is there and you don't like it so much. But if somebody gives you something and asks nothing in return, you feel loved. That is what we are supposed to do when we give.

We are supposed to give the students everything, and then they feel the love. Once they feel love, they can give love. There are many people who don't feel that love and that is why they come to yoga. But if they come to a teacher who is thinking to make more money, they will not feel that love. There is no love in this. Remember that. This is your test now.

So don't do that with your precious yoga. Taking money is not bad, but what you do with that money is what counts. You rent your hall with this money, you buy some pictures and you frame them. That is what we do. It is not good Karma if you put it aside for your own purposes. Then you won't be happy, you won't be blessed and you won't feel that love because your senses will always want more.

The vision of Swamiji was to pass on the love which you are receiving from the practice of yoga. You touch people's heart so that they can then go home and love their children and their wife in a pure way. If you keep this in mind, you will be wonderful yoga teachers.