



True World Order

Founder: Swami Vishnudevananda, est. 1957

## Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Academy

yoga exercises - breathing - relaxation - diet - meditation

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Bichlach 40, A-6370 Reith bei Kitzbühel, Tel. +43(0)5356/67404, Fax +43(0)5356/67404-4  
E-mail: tyrol@sivananda.net, www.sivananda.org/tyrol, www.sivananda.eu, ZVR 925544605

As early as 1985, Swami Vishnudevananda spoke out against the attempt of some national yoga unions to monopolize the certification of yoga teachers, effectively trying to prevent people from practising as yoga teachers unless they belonged to a particular union.

He stressed the importance of the guru–disciple lineage, the ancient yoga tradition in which the disciple’s spiritual wealth is inherited from the teacher.

Swami Vishnudevananda was alarmed at the trend in the West towards monopolization, a concept which is antithetical to the spiritual and traditional values of yoga. Swami Vishnudevananda and the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Organisation consider the following four points worthy of thought:

1. What are the fundamental qualifications of a yoga teacher?
2. Comparison of the Sivananda Yoga Teachers' Training Course and a part-time, “three-year” course
3. Significance and value of a diploma
4. What are the motivations behind those who oppose a four-week training course?

## **1. What are the qualifications of a yoga teacher?**

An aspiring yoga teacher who seeks the instruction of a teacher needs to pose the following questions:

### **Which guru does the teacher follow and to which tradition does he belong?**

A traditional teacher follows one of the six schools of Indian philosophy, each of which was developed by a particular sage. The six systems of philosophy are:

1. Purva Mimamsa, founded by Jaimini.
2. Uttara Mimamsa, or the non-dualistic philosophy of Vedanta, founded by Maharishi Vyasa and structured by the sage Shankarachara. Swami Sivananda and Swami Vishnudevananda follow this school of philosophy.
3. Sankhya, by Kapila Rishi.
4. Yoga, by Pantanjali Maharishi.
5. Vaisehika, by Kanada Rishi
6. Nyaya, founded by Gautama Rishi.

Thus disciples of Ramakrishna Paramahansa follow the teachings of Ramakrishna Paramahansa and impart his teachings to their own students. Swami Sivananda's disciples follow Swami Sivananda's teachings and pass this knowledge to their students; Ramana Maharishi's disciples follow Ramana Maharishi's teachings and transmit his wisdom.

Many authentic teachers received their qualifications from previous lives, like Swami Vivekananda and Swami Vishnudevananda, who after being touched by their masters were able to recall knowledge from their past lives.

This was also the case with Swami Sivananda: he met his teacher when he was still a wandering aspirant called Dr. Kuppuswamy. He received initiation from his teacher after just one hour. He then pursued a course of disciplined and balanced yoga practice for many years, ultimately becoming a recognised sage and master.

In his book of spiritual essays, *Bliss Divine*, Swami Sivananda describes the guru–disciple relationship as follows:

### **Guru-parampara (guru-disciple lineage)**

Spiritual knowledge is a matter of Guru-parampara. It is handed down from Guru to disciple. Gaudapadacharya imparted Self-knowledge to his disciple Govindacharya; Govindacharya to his disciple Sankaracharya; Sankaracharya to his disciple Suresvaracharya. Matsyendranath imparted knowledge to his disciple Gorakhnath; Gorakhnath to Nivrittinath; Nivrittinath to Jnanadev. Totapuri imparted knowledge to Sri Ramakrishna, and Ramakrishna to Swami Vivekananda. It was Ashtavakra who moulded the life of Raja Janaka. It was Gorakhnath who shaped the spiritual destiny of Raja Bhartrihari. It was Lord Krishna who made Arjuna and Uddhava get themselves established in the spiritual path when their minds were in an unsettled state.

### **Sakti-sanchar**

Just as you can give an orange to a man, so also, spiritual power can be transmitted by one to another. This method of transmitting spiritual powers is termed Sakti-sanchar. In Sakti-sanchar, a certain spiritual vibration of the Sadguru is actually transferred to the mind of the disciple. The Guru can transform the disciple by a look, a touch, a thought or a word, or mere willing.

Sakti-sanchar comes through Parampara. It is a hidden mystic science. It is handed down from Guru to disciple.

Lord Jesus, through touch, transmitted his spiritual power to some of his disciples. A disciple of Samartha Ramdas transmitted his power to that dancing girl's daughter who was very passionate towards him. The disciple gazed at her and gave her Samadhi. Her passion vanished. She became very religious and spiritual. Lord Krishna touched the blind eyes of Surdas. The inner eye of Surdas was opened. He had Bhava Samadhi. Lord Gouranga, through his touch, produced divine intoxication in many people and converted them to his side. Atheists even danced in ecstasy in the streets by his touch and sang songs of Hari.

The disciple should not rest satisfied with the transmission of power from the Guru. The initiation is the match required to start the fire. The student keeps the fire burning through his own sadhana, otherwise the fire will die. He will have to struggle hard in Sadhana for further perfection and attainments. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa touched Swami Vivekananda. Swami Vivekananda had superconscious experience. He struggled hard for seven years more, even after the touch, for attaining perfection.

Swami Sivananda practised intense sadhana on the banks of the Ganges for several years after his initiation. Similarly, Swami Vishnudevananda practised intense sadhana for ten years before leaving India for the West.

## **Was the yoga teacher initiated by a guru, and did the guru instruct him to pass on his teachings?**

The great Ramakrishna Paramahansa, who could neither read nor write, initiated the learned scholar Swami Vivekananda, who became a great torch bearer of yoga and Vedanta, and sent him to the World Parliament of Religions to represent the wisdom of yoga.

Within one year Swami Sivananda initiated Swami Vishnudevananda into sannyas and gave him the titles Yogi Raj (King of Yoga) and Professor of Hatha Yoga. Although Swami Vishnudevananda was only 18 years old, Swami Sivananda allowed him to develop a disciplined system for teaching hatha yoga. There was no physical teaching, but a spiritual initiation. Swami Sivananda touched Swami Vishnudevananda's forehead and revived the memory of his knowledge of yoga from his previous life. Consequently, Swami Vishnudevananda was sent to the West in 1957 to spread the teachings of yoga.

This is the tradition of yoga – a great spiritual tradition which is now at risk of commercial interests that aim to monopolize yoga.

## **What is the yoga teacher practising himself?**

Yoga is a way of life, not an academic hypothesis. To be an authentic teacher, one must practise daily, bringing order and discipline into one's life. The yoga teacher must abstain from tobacco, alcohol, meat, fish, eggs, onions and garlic. Otherwise, as in the story told by Jesus, they become like the Pharisee in the temple who privately broke all the moral laws that he had publicly proclaimed should be adhered to.

## **Is the yoga teacher thorough and systematic in his/her teaching of yoga?**

Swami Vishnudevananda summarised the wisdom of yoga into five points:

1. Proper exercise (Asanas)
2. Proper breathing (Pranayama)
3. Proper relaxation (Savasana)
4. Proper diet (vegetarian)
5. Positive thinking and meditation (Vedanta and Dhyana)

Swami Vishnudevananda was the first to establish a systematic method of instruction (asanas, pranayama, meditation, mantra yoga, kirtan, Vedanta, vegetarian diet) in Europe, Canada and the United States. He did this in the wake of seeing many people claiming to be yoga teachers after having spent a few weeks in India or having simply taken an introductory course.

## **2. Comparison of the Sivananda Yoga Teachers' Training Course with a "three-year course"**

The training programmes may be compared in terms of study duration, type of teaching practice and quality of training:

### **Total training time**

The Sivananda Yoga Teachers' Training Course, consisting of 401 training units (TU) of 45 minutes each, runs over a period of four weeks and is characterised by intensive and continuous teacher–student contact.

A three-year course consists of two days (5.35 TU each) on one weekend a month with a total time of 401 hours of teacher–student contact, provided that the teachers and students participate in all classes.

Swami Vishnudevananda joked that one could teach a "100-year course", which would consist of a 15-minute class per month, corresponding to 3 hours a year, 300 hours or 450 training units over 100 years. The participant would receive his diploma shortly before death and then could present it in heaven.

Important questions arise: How many people have graduated from the training course? How many training hours were actually attended? Which ethical guidelines do the training teachers follow?

### **Quality of the student's experience**

The application of a yoga of synthesis is taught through daily instruction in the positive atmosphere of an ashram or centre. It is by Swami Sivananda's grace that until now over 26,000 people have taken the intensive Sivananda Yoga Teachers' Training Course at Sivananda Ashrams and centres around the world.

It is not known how many of these 26,000 people are formally teaching at present. More important is the fact that they have been taught to incorporate a spiritual and traditional yoga practice into their own lives. As Swami Vishnudevananda said, "A yoga teacher should be a yoga practitioner, not

merely a preacher. The teacher who practises is like a radiant rose, and will attract students like bees to honey. He who does not practice is without energy or prana, and will retain students for a short time only."

Swami Vishnudevananda modelled the Sivananda Yoga Teachers' Training Course on the course taught at the Yoga Vedanta Forest Academy of his guru Swami Sivananda in Rishikesh. The yogic way of life is condensed into a residential four-week training course, in the same manner as Lord Krishna taught his student Arjuna when he condensed the spiritual wisdom of the entire Bhagavad Gita into a few hours' instruction on the battlefield.

The title "three-year course" is in itself misleading. In actual fact, instruction is offered only every second weekend. Part-time instruction of this kind cannot provide students with a profound experience of yoga, nor can it support students in developing an integral yoga practice. It is not like a three-year university course, where a student has to study every day in order to earn a diploma.

### **Quality of the teachers' training course**

Swami Vishnudevananda wrote the *Complete Illustrated Book of Yoga*, which has sold 1.5 million copies in seven languages and which can be considered the Bible of yogis. His book *Meditation and Mantras* is a very precise explanation of the authentic science of meditation and mantras. His last book, *The Sivananda Companion to Yoga* (also published under the title *The New Book of Yoga*) was translated into five languages within two years of its release.

Swami Vishnudevananda developed the first systematic four-week yoga teachers' training course, which is a practical, all-encompassing 24/7 experience of yoga, accompanied by its own course book and teachers' manual. He imparted the ancient tradition of Hatha Yoga, not under his own name, but in the name and by the grace of his guru Swami Sivananda, whose instructions he was following.

Teachers of a "three-year course" should answer the following questions: What is his guru's background and what are his guru's teaching methods? How much time did he spend with his guru, and what are his own teaching methods? In the yoga tradition a student is expected to study with one teacher only. To combine different systems according to whim or convenience is considered antithetical to the teachings. A yoga system takes a lifetime to master. The guru-parampara or guru-disciple lineage is therefore of paramount importance.

One does not become a yoga teacher by listening to lectures, spending a few weeks at places like the Sivananda Ashram in Rishikesh, the Ramakrishna Mission, the Aurobindo Ashram or the Ramana Maharishi Ashram, by giving talks here and there or by writing books.

### **3. What significance and value do diplomas have?**

A guru can hand out titles and diplomas at will. Diplomas can be given to students who appear suited, but are in fact of no value if the student does not practice what he has been taught. A diploma serves to encourage the student. For example, Swami Vishnudevananda was bestowed the title "Yogi Raj" and a diploma by his guru. A diploma should not be used for commercial purposes.

Swami Sivananda conferred many diplomas and titles in order to encourage his students to use their talents for the good of mankind, without payment. Unlike a diploma in the fields of medicine or law, the diploma of the Yoga Teachers' Training course is not meant to be used to get a job. It is more like a spiritual blessing by the guru than a professional diploma. The title conferred in the first course is "Yoga Shiromani" or Crown Jewel of Yoga, and that in the Advanced Yoga Teachers' Training Course is called "Yoga Acharya" or master of yoga. The text of the certificates comes directly from the diplomas which Swami Sivananda gave to his disciples (see the attachment).

Through the grace of the all-powerful the teacher bestows his spiritual blessing so that the student will always be a practitioner of yoga and not a preacher. With time he may find the inner treasure of spiritual peace and strength, and then attract hungry souls like a flower attracts bees.

### **4. What are the motivations behind those who oppose a four-week training course?**

Opposition to a four-week training course springs entirely from commercial self-interest. There is a desire to create a controlled market of yoga teachers, producing a limited number of union-approved but often unqualified teachers. Yoga unions which have self-appointed directors who are influenced by the teachings of different gurus are meaningless within the tradition of yoga.

Swami Vishnudevananda urged all aspirants to follow one teacher only. As his or her practice progresses, the student passes on the knowledge obtained from the guru to their own students – with or without a diploma. This is the traditional way.

Swami Vishnudevananda would ask this question of all yoga teachers: "Are you going to practise and follow the principles of yoga, or preach yoga as a way to earn a living, like the man on the street corner who preaches the Bible while smoking, drinking and breaking other commandments?"