

# Le Guru is You!

BY PAUL REYNOLDS

## The Teacher-Student Relationship

# Hatha Yoga and Beyond

Check in with your memory for a moment. What picture or memory is triggered by the thought of teacher or guru (dispeller of darkness)? For me, it might be my second grade teacher whom I accidentally kept calling Mom. Maybe it was my high school chemistry teacher who finally explained the subject so I could understand it. It could've been my Uncle Norm whose loving badgering challenged me to greater goals. Who was that one hatha yoga teacher, on that one epic day when I received my first yogic "ah -haaaa" (that peak [or maybe 'peek'] of the indefinable connection to a source of being that I knew was always present yet always seemed to be searching for.)

Since the practice of hatha yoga resurfaced in Western consciousness, the teacher-student relationship has been the subject of many revelations and much concern. Headlines scream about teachers seemingly overstepping the boundaries of social propriety, or even yogic propriety. Also, there is the perception, whether overtly stated or not, that because of yoga's connection to a spiritual practice, the hatha teacher is sometimes cast into the role of a direct conduit to the "source." (This is true, just as it is also true that we are all such conduits though it may take a lifetime, or two or three [and a few gurus] to really embrace the connection.)

What are the responsibilities of a teacher or guru? What makes an effective teacher? And, how are beginning students of hatha yoga to know and trust that a certain teacher is right for them? What are the students' responsibilities as they practice with a teacher? Can one rely on that age-old adage, "When the student is ready the teacher appears; when the teacher is ready the student appears"?

Stephen Copes, in his book *Yoga and the Quest for True Self*, comments on the student/teacher relationship: "Relationships to spiritual teachers and communities are subject to the law of parallel process - they are equally characterized by love and hate, wish and fear, hope and dread, self-love and self-punitive guilt."

Relationship is a two-way street. This phenomenon of teaching/learning must be taken on by both parties whether in a hatha class, a public or private school classroom, or even a heart to heart talk between parent and child.

What is the responsibility of students as they consider the various types of yoga and teachers that cover the globe? As students are we to "give over" our bodies, and sometimes our selves, to those teachers who either have the most experience, come from a certified lineage, have extensive educational references, have written a book, or talk a good talk? Are we asking a teacher to fix us, heal us, show me the way to a better life? This puts an incredible burden on both teacher and student.

Again from Stephen Cope's book: "Teacher and student grow further and further from an understanding of their complicated unconscious motivations. It is only a matter of time until the situation collapses of its own weight. The powerful forces of idealization are suddenly transmuted into a bonfire of devaluation, hatred, and rage, usually coming on the heels of some dramatic revelation that the teacher, the hoped for god-man or god-woman, is really all too human."

In practical terms this can translate into a hatha yoga student saying 'no' to a teacher that is adjusting him or her into a pose that she (or he) doesn't feel is appropriate or difficult or painful or isn't ready for. The hatha yoga student must be

able to tell his teacher "not today" "not right now" and the Yoga teacher's responsibility is to create an atmosphere to where it feels safe to do so. In class situations one can be carried by the energy of everyone 'seemingly' getting the request from the one leading the class- but it is always very important that one be aware of one's own needs and abilities before proceeding. While it is true that at times our mind can limit us to what truly can be discovered, eventually however that discovery will be made (circumstances, another teacher, our own perceived progress into the posture) and another "ah- haaa will be experienced.

### THE BUDDHA ADVISED

*Do not believe in what you have heard;  
do not believe in things because they have been handed down for many generations;  
do not believe in anything because it is rumored and spoken of by many;  
do not believe merely because the written statement of some old sage is produced;  
do not believe in conjectures;  
do not believe merely in the authority of your teachers and elders.  
After observation and analysis, when it agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it and live up to it.*

I turned to our hatha yoga teaching community here on the island for insight into this sometimes perplexing relationship:

**LIDA MARTIN** - I provide the opportunity for people to befriend and listen to their bodies, to discover from direct experience which practices support well-being and growth. Yoga on the mat becomes yoga off the mat as they apply this to all areas of their lives. As a teacher it is my responsibility to remain a student myself, always searching, learning, experimenting and experiencing yoga on the mat and bringing it into my world, being present for life fully and completely.



**SAMANTHA FOX** - I believe my responsibility, as a hatha yoga instructor is to offer fully to my students what I know to be most true. I hope to inspire my students to connect to their hearts, enjoy being fully present in their bodies, and to live to their potential as authentically as possible.

**MICHAELLE EDWARDS** - My most significant teacher in my 30 plus years of practicing and teaching hatha yoga has been the human body. I am speaking of not only mine but all the other folks' bodies I have had the honor of learning from via "teaching" them. "My biggest responsibility as a teacher is to help students become their own teacher by showing them

how to listen to the language of the body.

**PATRICIA HOWARD** - My greatest responsibility is to the spirit of the individual student rather than to the classical form of a particular pose/asana. The shape of the pose will vary with the ability and flexibility and shape of the student, and thus needs to be adjusted accordingly. Overall, my goal is to help a student open a window of possibility through which he/she can glimpse the utter perfection of his or her own individual connection with Spirit.

Eventually the line of demarcation between student and teacher disappears as they begin to establish an arena that feels safe to both. Teacher becomes student, and student becomes teacher, and perhaps that is the greatest gift of any relationship - and the essence of our saying "namaste" and bowing to each other, realizing no point of departure, no place of separation - we are one.

*"The true teacher has no student, all is Being and only Silence speaks. The perfect teacher has no teachings because he knows that you are free already. So the true teacher's non-teaching is that there is no teacher, no student, no teaching, and that nothing has ever existed. This teaching must be without words and must land in your heart. If you try to understand, it will only land in your head." - Poonja-ji*

Everything in this experience we call life comes forth as a teacher when we are ready to receive the lesson, and the lessons are hints or revelations or reminders of the questions we all are faced with: "Who am I?" and "Why am I here"?

*"... But the teaching is not ourselves. It is some explanation of ourselves. To study the teaching is to know yourselves. That is why we do not ever attach to the teaching or to the teacher. The moment you meet a teacher you should leave the teacher and you should be independent. You want a teacher so that you can be independent. So you study yourselves. You have the teacher for yourselves, not for the teacher." - Suzuki Roshi*

*"May we realize a peace that depends on ...nothing."*

## NAMASTE

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