

Answers to Yoga Teachers' Questions
Meditation Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota
July 17, 1983
Swami Veda Bharati

Question: "There is only one hour and a half in a class for eight sessions. What should students have accomplished?"

Well, the content of the courses is designed in such a way that, I think, that a teacher who has confidently built his own ability is able to cover those contents, but I know that that is not what you are talking about. We can say: some understanding of the general background of what yoga is all about, where it leads to.

I think there should be two results of a student having completed the course: One is a desire to practice whatever little he has learned, a desire to practice. That you have inspired in him or her the desire that he wants to practice and master it and refine it and perfect it - whatever has been the content of the course, whatever he has learned. And secondly, there should remain in him a desire to advance, to come back for the next step. That there should remain in him a desire to know - where does yoga really lead? - that it is not something in isolation from the rest of one's life and the rest of one's philosophy, that it leads to changes in other areas. But this second point - actually it is the third point: that he knows that it leads to changes in other areas, should be imparted in such a way that it is not frightening, but is inspiring. So I can just think of three things that the teacher accomplishes through the class:

- (1) the students desire to continue practicing, refining, further mastering what is already learned,
- (2) the desire to advance, to come back for more, ask for more in him. There should arise this desire to ask for more, and
- (3) the understanding that what he has learned is not in isolation, something separate from life, that it leads to changes in life and to his entire philosophy and his approach to everything he is related to. And this third part, not in such a way that it is frightening to him, but rather that it is inspiring to him.

These are the three thoughts that I consider, my own class to be successful when people have gone away with these three particular attitudes.

Question: "Why do we teach?"

We have answered this question many times. We teach out of compassion. There is suffering in the world, and our vow is to reduce the suffering in the world. The cause of suffering, in the *Yoga-sutras*, is ignorance. Our teaching reduces, somewhat, the level of that ignorance. Our

desire to teach arises directly out of our compassion for anyone who walks in here. He walks in here because he is seeking for some kind of help - and we are helpers.

Question: "How do we deal with a very strong emotional response in a class?"

Very, very simple. Equanimity in your own emotion. Throw something negative at me. Come on.

["I don't like this class!"] Yes, that is understood. If you don't like, can you tell me exactly what it is that you don't like? ["You are not telling me anything new!"] All right. Actually there is nothing new. You already know the answer to the question. You only need to be aware that you know the answer.

See? It is *your* emotional tone, you see. That is the response. And very soon, you see, the emotion of the other party is reduced. It becomes . . . You see, equanimity takes its place. But if you yourself cultivate the same kind of emotions outside your class with which other people are walking into your class, then you are not going to help them. Then it becomes a contest, a competition. It is not a helping, see? So that is why we speak of a personal philosophy of life for a teacher. What emotions he maintains. What rigidities he has. How flexible he or she is, see. And how you respond to any intensely positive or intensely negative emotion thrown at you in life. That is what will determine how well you are able to maintain equanimity in the class. Otherwise it becomes an act. All right?

Question: "When is a teacher ready to teach?"

Three prerequisites: One, there is in him intense desire to help. Secondary to that, when he has mastered some basic techniques, incorporated some basic technique into his own life so that when he comes before a class or a person, he speaks out of the conviction of personal experience and can elaborate on it without a book, as it were, without having had to memorize notes for the class. And three, when he regards - this should actually be the first, but anyway we can put it three here - is when he regards himself as an instrument of the Guru Lineage. When, in other words, there is *not* this thought: "*I* am going to be a teacher." See? "*I* am now a teacher." See? As though it were some kind of a promotion at work: "I joined as a member, and now I am a *teacher* in the Center!" See? If there is this ego, then your teaching will not be effective, will not be successful. When you sit down in your teaching seat, you are an instrument of the Guru Lineage, and only then will you teach effortlessly, and the Guru will teach through you, and you won't know where the teaching comes from. The questions which you have struggled for so long yourself, someone will ask that *very* question; you will open your mouth and the correct answer will pop out, and you will say, "Hey! Where did that one come from?" Right? So, these are the three prerequisites of being a teacher. I would add to it what I have said earlier, and that is emotional equanimity.

I look for emotional equanimity and flexibility of character. People are too rigid in their approach. They don't want to change. This-is-the-way-I-am kind of an argument. They remain - I see sometimes people of twenty-five, thirty, forty, forty-five, fifty, a permanent rebellious American teenager has become the norm of the life of a large number of people. Entire generation of people has grown in the United States who are permanent, rebellious American teenagers, throwing tantrum at every step. You know, throwing a tantrum at everything: "I'm not gonna do it, because I don' wanna do it." You know. See? That sometimes you show it quite clearly and show it that way, and sometimes you don't, but it comes out clear and simple. And that is not a sign of maturity. It's a sign of something quite immature.

Question: "I was listening to your tape today, and it dawned on me that the emotions and spiritual growth are interwoven. And I'm trying to understand within myself exactly where the development occurs. I have my emotions, and they're powerful emotions at times. At other times there is more contentment in myself. So how do I sort of refine this spiritual development?"

Yes, you know, I have spoken about it for years and years and years. And there's no way I can put it in a nutshell. But my own experience is that, I have always said that I consider relationships to be the test of spirituality. I'll put it a little bit, slightly differently also, and I think I've said that on some tape someplace, somewhere else too. And that is that as one grows spiritually, the arising of the painful thoughts is reduced, the incidents of painful thoughts. Both the incidents and the intensity of painful thoughts is reduced, see? And the incidents and intensity of positive thoughts, happy thoughts, joyfulness, just simply naturally increases. And if this not happening, you may be able to, you know, touch your heel with the back of the head, but you are not making spiritual progress. The sattvic thought is a pleasant thought. You live in a world of pleasant thoughts and create pleasant thoughts around you, and people respond to you pleasantly. [This] is the first and foremost test of spiritual growth. You can sit and meditate six hours a day, you know, for thirty-six years, you know, and [if you] cultivate painful thoughts in the other eighteen hours of the day, you are not getting anywhere. Just watching your thoughts, watching them and purifying them.

There is a lovely book out, *Anger the Misunderstood Emotion* by Carol Tarvis, says things I've been saying for years. Just wonderful reading, you know. I strongly recommend that book. We can order. It's expensive. I think about \$15.00. It's really worth reading. In fact, the teachers should undertake a little project in which you have recommended readings, you know, on these subjects, like *Diet for a Small Planet* [by Frances Moore Lappe], *Small is Beautiful* [by E. F. Schumacher], *Voluntary Simplicity* [by Duane Elgin] this book *Anger the Misunderstood Emotion*. From time to time I have recommended books like that. We should have the kinds of books of which we can talk in a class, you know, just kind of throw and idea: "You might want to read such-and-such book," you know. A very nice topically-written books, lovely books. We should have a list of non-Institute, general books like that. I don't know who It would be a very simple project. You can just keep adding to that list, and later on you can grade it by

"Beginning," "Intermediate" and "Advanced" if you like. You know, or whatever. There are a few like that, very, very nice. I do have a book list on various yoga titles: "Beginning," "Intermediate," "Advanced," "Karma," "Christianity," this, that, so on, "Scriptures," and so forth.

Your personal practice is the key. Keeping of the personal practice. It shows. Personal practice of your own yoga and meditation. Practice of meditation before teaching. We used to have a rule here. I don't know how well it is still enforced or not, that you come one hour before class and sit where you are teaching from, sit and meditate. Come an hour before; sit and meditate. I had this rule right from the beginning, and if it's not being maintained, it should be maintained. Get here an hour before, wash yourself, change into your teaching clothes, change your mind, change your atmosphere, sit, meditate, then teach. So, your personal practice of meditation at home, your personal practice before teaching, and your personal practice of mindfulness, cultivating purity of body, mind and thought, see?

And if a teacher himself has neither love for others nor discipline in himself, no matter how much technique you know or how many certificates you've gathered, your students will run away. You won't keep them. Learn to keep your students. Learn to keep your students in the class, and learn to keep your students in the Center after the class is over. You are not teachers of classes; you are teachers of people. Teaching a class is only part of teaching the people, see. And you are concerned with each and every individual in your class. Remember that we want them to continue their practice, we want them to be inspired to do so. You are their model, see. It is not like a university class. You are not like a college teacher, walk in the class, scribble a few things on the blackboard, and you walk out, see. Whether you do your homework, or you don't do your homework, whether you get "A" or "B," well, as teacher it is none of your business, you know. A lot of people also come here with that type of attitude: "Why are you concerned with whether I practice or I don't practice. I pay my fees." We have had that kind of thing. You have to handle that very gently. Initially anything negative should be handled very gently.

Wriggle your way into their hearts. Three days later the person himself realizes: "I can't do that to him. He's such a nice man. She's such a nice teacher." Well, you have changed something, see. Create a personality that you can use to other people's advantage. Create a personality, you see, just by the presence of which other people change, see. A lot of people who disagree with the way that the Center is run, and this and that and so on. Oh, they sort of stay on and stay around year after year and put up with all the imperfections and all the faults and all the flaws. "Well, can't leave Panditji." Well, why can't you leave Panditji? What's so special? I use their love for myself. I've created love in their mind for me, and I use their love towards me for their own benefit. And out of that love they continue some practice and try to make some changes. And my master, he is such a master at it. You just won't believe it. You do the same. Positive manipulation. You are, without any excuse or apology, you are people-manipulators. You are manipulators of people's psychology in such a way that they change and they improve, that they get better. You try all kinds of psychological props so that they go away better than they were. That's all. In whatever area they go away better, it doesn't matter. Even if their noses didn't touch the knees, but they went away better in some other way, then that's just fine, you see.

So it's your personal communication. A lot of times I've found among teachers no eye-contact with students, see. No contact, no personal feeling. A lot of times the teachers in the class are not *watching* what the students are doing, see. They are just doing *your* bit. They are just doing *their* bit, coming in the class and going through the steps, and done. Not really watching which person is not doing it right. And what *are* his difficulties? What is his difficulty? What is the *psychology* of a stiff neck? With very many different meanings to this phrase. There is a psychology to a stiff neck, understand. And you have to work on that psychology. But that requires *your* developing *your* perception of people, and your perception develops only through love. There's no technique. You just *have* to be *genuinely* interested in the people for the time you are sitting as a teacher or acting as a teacher anywhere, you see. Your genuine compassion - so much pain, so much suffering, you see.

Question: "Do we have any kind of instruction someplace which explains the psychology of what happens: why somebody can't bend forward. What is the psychology behind it? Why somebody's neck is so stiff. What is the psychology?"

Student: "*Body Mind* [by Ken Dychtwald] and some body language books. But there is a book called *Who is the Matter with Me?* It's actually a medical book, and it's very simply written. I'm not telling you it's highfalutin medical, but the point is that it looks at what is the personality, what is the particular disease, what is the need in the personality to be sick. And you can just extrapolate from that with your own intuition as to how that applies to individuals, including yourself. I mean, that is who you learn with first. It's your own house. But it really has helped me just to look at other people, you know. What is the need? And then you're much more gentle with that person anyway, and then they begin to change."

Question: "Should we be teaching only the postures and breath-awareness and mindfulness, or should be going into some of these finer details?"

I have an ambivalent feeling about it. This kind of a thing verges on therapy, and we are not here trained in psychiatry, psychology or medicine, see. That is why we send people with really acute problems to those who are qualified to deal with them in this particular type of terminology. And in a large majority of cases you don't really need to discuss this in detail. Or you can talk to a person individually and suggest that he go into himself and see where exactly the stiff neck is really coming from, see, and search. But a lot of people are also not quite qualified to do that internal search, see? They are liable to, instead of blaming "X," they start blaming "Y," instead of the Alpha - that's me, the person himself, and finding out exactly where the resistance is coming from. So we cannot at this stage develop that particular content of our classes in that direction until we are trained into psychotherapy based on physical yoga, see? A little of my reading on *The Philosophy of Hatha Yoga* might help, but I don't think I have gone into this part of it at all. I haven't, and I don't know if any of the other Institute writers or writers on yoga have, you know. But you would have to handle that part very carefully so that you, an

unqualified person, may not be accused of using therapy and thereby complicating matters. We have always been very, very legally conscious. That's why we don't have biofeedback here. Even though some of our teachers have biofeedback programs privately elsewhere, we don't have one here for the same reason; that we want to be extremely careful.

Inaudible Question: "Are there any ancient texts that go into quite this sort of subjects? You mentioned once that precise measurements are taken of the distances between various parts of the body and certain dispositions and character types are determined."

Yes, there is the ancient text called *Samudraka-shastra*. I don't think it has a published translation. I think it has a mimeographed thesis or something available someplace by the ancient author, Samudra. But that is simply more the foundation of a palmistry-like science, you know. You can say It's not quite astrology. It's simply the reading of a person's body, the way people read palms.

Question: "You once mentioned that there are texts in which there was a particular method in which Brahmins were taught from birth to assess certain personality types as far as different students go."

Yes, there are writings which do speak of the body characters with relation to qualification of a student. This is done more in the texts that are not in the mainstream of yoga. For example, *Visuddhi-magga*. There are one or two excellent English translations available, but you probably will not go beyond the first four pages. It's so thick, you know, and so detailed. This is the highest manual of Buddhist meditation system and Buddhist meditation pedagogy. And you would find some of this kind on information there. It has not been paraphrased. This aspect has not been paraphrased into more readable English. And I believe that there are similar texts in the Chan school, but I am personally not familiar with the Chinese works. Those people who wrote these works, see, where did they learn from? See. Learn from there. See. Learn from your intuition. Who is going to sit down and memorize, you know, the shape of the nose in relation to the qualification for postures? No. At this stage of our development, it's a little too ambitious. The basic yoga postures and so on are designed to take care of whatever resistance you have through the movement and breathing and so on, in person of reasonable mental health. A person whose mental health is higher than the normal reasonable expectation isn't going to come and sit in your class; he'll go to the right guru, okay. And a person whose mental health is lower than a mean average norm, does not belong in the class. Send him to a therapist. See. Okay. But a little mention of it occasionally is helpful. See. And you just have to learn to perceive what *might* be the psychological background, see.

Question: "Panditji, what you have just said I don't want to labor, but there will be many different interpretations and impressions left for each of us because the idea of psychological background is so widely understood and misunderstood. Is there a specific way in which yoga

helps an individual to understand the idea of psychological background and to improve the general tone or to understand that better?"

Okay, when we use the word "psychology," we don't use it in the reductionist sense: "my relationship with my mother caused it" kind of thing, you know. "Maybe if you talked with my mother, it might help me." That is *not* what we mean, okay. We are talking about the states of mind that we have cultivated. You see, when an incident "X" occurs in your life, there is no mechanically predetermined response "Y" that you must give. People say, "Well, I am this way because incident "X" occurred, implying that to incident "X" there is fixed mechanistically determined response "Y". You follow? And that becomes an excuse-making and, you know, rationalizing and justifying and so on and so forth for the "Y," the response that we choose. But, you have response "Y-1", "Y-2", "Y-3" and "Y-4", and "Z" and "Z-1" and "Z-2" and "Z-3" and "Z-4", and all the letters in between and all the possible algebraic formulations you can give. You follow? And so, first of all, we must not use, see, Freudian-Jungian analytic methods so completely that we are slaves to them, that we are slaves to the incident "X" that occurred, because person-A in the face of the same incident "X" will respond one way and person-B will respond in a different way. And person-A at one time will respond one way, and at another time will respond in another way, and so on.

So we speak of internal states of mind that we cultivate. I personally believe and strongly believe that ideals are the best therapy for any emotional difficulty. The ideals that you have believed in, that you have cultivated, that you live by, are the ones, you see, that can help you determine your emotional responses, see? If, for example, if you strongly believe in the ideal of monogamy, you can't have an emotional response to another woman approaching you, no matter how beautiful she is. You simply do not have an emotional response to another man approaching you, no matter how handsome or attractive he is. You see? And another person says, "Well, I was in such a situation. There was nothing I could do about it. Oh well, I'm a human being. This was my response." Do you follow what I'm saying?

So, I consider ideals to be the determinants of the weakness or strength of our emotions. A certain little emotion may arise, but at what intensity it is experienced is determined by your ideal. You may have the emotion of rage, but your ideal determines whether you are going to take it to its logical conclusion as murder, or throwing a bottle through somebody's window. It's your ideal which determine it. "Well, I can't allow myself to get that far. I'm only going to curse him in my mind, or standing on my balcony, or throw abuse at him. I'm going to take him to court." You follow? "Well, maybe I'll have a fist fight with him, but I'm not going to murder him."

You see, it's your ideals which determine the intensity of your emotional ceiling and its expression, you see. And it is the cultivating of ideals that I believe in actually, not the cultivating of emotions. Emotions get cultivated automatically as ideals get cultivated. That's why you cannot find an exact word in English for *Yamas* and *Niyamas*. Non-violence: is it an ideal or is it an emotion? Follow? Somebody slaps me on one cheek. My response of slapping

him on two, see?, both sides of him, or my response of showing him my other cheek, that is determined by my ideal, see?

And this book, *Psychology of the Beautitudes* by Arpita is such a beautiful, neat little book on it. Follow? I mean, really to understand the yoga view of emotions, all you have to do is to read the *Sermon on the Mount*. If you have nothing else, you know, throw away all the books, if you really read the *Sermon on the Mount*, you have got the yoga psychology, psychology as understood by any person of spiritual aspiration. That has been *my* savior, okay. I only speak from my experience, you know.

Question: "Can anyone create positive ideals, coming from any background?"

Can anyone create positive ideals? Yes. Coming from *any* background? Yes. You already have positive ideals. Everybody has positive ideals. Everybody has the seed of positive ideals. There is no one, no one in the world, because that's a basic, divine urge in a human being. In us human beings there is a basic beastly urge. There are basic human urges. And there are basic divine urges. See? Which one of these you chose to respond to is up to you. But all three kinds of urges are present in every human being, see? You simply *choose* to respond to the divine urges in you. You start cultivating those ideals, see. And when you don't choose to cultivate them, then you have all kinds of excuses, you see.

But, you see, it all requires a great deal of flexibility in human beings. And I am more and more recognizing what a sinister handicap it is that is keeping all of us back in our progress: inflexibility, you know.

Question: "Is it true that if you're flexible in the body, that it also reflects in the mind?"

Well, yes. If you are flexible in the body, it reflects in the mind. And if you are flexible in the mind, you are flexible in the body. You know, you may have recently participated in the Tennis-yoga. That's what's being talked about, you know. We had Ricardo Mello from the Institute here a while back. And his entire teaching is on how one used the body, how one carries the shot, see?, and so on. It shows his entire character.

Question: "How does one lead a yoga life-style with flexibility?"

We talk about regulation and we talk about discipline. And then some people are so fixated on discipline that they can't manage to break a rule without feeling guilty, you know. I was amazed when I first came to the West, okay, way back thirty years ago; well, one of the things I had to learn to do was wear a tie, okay. That's part of the normal Western mode of dressing. It required a flexibility, see?, to learn to wear a tie, you know. In England, you know, if you are not wearing

a tie and you go to some decent company, they say, "Why naked?" See. And then I came here in the middle of the late sixties, and I came from teaching in the university with my ties on, and some of my students in my very first classes sitting on the doorsteps of my house started giggling and laughing: "Hey look! He's got a ties on!" You know. So for them, that was a position, not realizing that for me that was not the position. For me, wearing a tie was a sign of flexibility. Do you understand? So you take a fixed position. Wear a tie; that is a fixed position. Don't wear a tie is another fixed position, see? I don't take those fixed positions, and where the occasion calls for it, I dress in immaculate Western way. And when the occasion calls for it, I dress in immaculate Eastern way. And where there is neither of the occasion, I wear mini-dhotis or a loincloth, you see. But I invite some of my ashramites to come out to a dinner with me and want to enjoy their company, and they are so fixated on wearing jeans, you see, than they can't stand the thought of flexibility of changing into something that is appropriate for the occasion, see? They are stuck. They are not making progress in emotional flexibility. In everything they will take a fixed approach. Do you understand? So shift. Keep your ideals. Keep your principles. If you've got those, you can afford to shift. But if with every shift your ideals change, see, then is not a discipline; it is not an ideal. It is, then, fanaticism.

Question: "There is a fine line between when to stick to your ideas and being rigid."

Yes, there is a very, very fine line as to when you adhere to your ideals and when you allow yourself a little leeway. You see, the ideal is maintained in the heart, in the mind, see, and when that is maintained, then you can compromise the external act. Only you are the judge, you see. Only you are the judge, see. Someone hears I have had a long, long, long travel. I'm very tired, and I'm still doing seminars and so on. A not-so-young lady comes and says, "Panditji, let me give you a massage." I say, "No, thank you very much. I don't let a woman touch me, okay. I'll never accept a massage from a woman. For a while I had to decide, for example, whether to accept any of my women students embrace, okay? And I said to Swamiji, "Swamiji, what should I do. I don't want to offend anybody. People do get offended." And he said, "Well, keep *your* mind clear."

Fine. I keep my mind clear, see? And I know what's there. Sometimes I also know that the embrace is less than pure, see. If I detect that, I separate myself. I create a barrier. See? But it's *my* perception, *my* ideal in *my* mind and *my* thought that is important to me. And it's not whether I actually let a woman touch my hand or not, see?

So you are the person to see into your ideals, see? Then the external act can be very flexible. All right. Mindfulness. Mindfulness of your ideals. Actually there is nothing to cultivating emotions or thinking less painful thoughts and so on and so forth. Don't make *that* such a problem. Cultivating the ideals is the thing, and living by those ideals *non-fanatically*, follow, non-fanatically. And don't go around imposing them on everybody, you know: "Hey, this book here says you need to take a vow of poverty. So, my dear husband, you've got to throw out your coin collection."

Question: "I fear I'm becoming judgmental, passing judgment on people, and I don't like this quality of myself. Where does judgmental stuff come out of?"

Well, I think the judgement is part of one's own ego, you know. You see, fortunately or unfortunately, for my own spiritual progress I leave such a spiritually sheltered life, you know, that sometimes even my wife says, "You don't live out in the world. You don't understand the problems people have to deal with when they're out there." And that is possible. It is possible that at times I am giving advice without knowing exactly what it is that people have to deal with in ordinary daily life, because I have such a shielded, such a protected life, you know. I just don't have the company, you know, day-to-day, ordinary-life company that some of you people have to deal with, you know. Everybody who comes to me comes with some kind of a spiritual face, you know. And so it's very easy for me to sit there and say, "Well, I am not judgmental." See. Once again it's a matter of remaining unostentatious in spirituality, see? You don't have to make a loud declaration of your spirituality.

One of the things that I do succeed in doing is that whatever level of a person I meet, I tend to say, "Yeah! Yeah! Sure! Yes, yes! Okay! There is something to that. You know. I choose to be this way. I'm sorry, you know. That's kind of my preference, you know, and so on. But, yes, carry on doing this way. You might try something else along side here, you know." Gently drop the hint, see? Because I don't have to go prove my spirituality to him. You know, I only have to prove it to myself and to my Guru, you see. So, it's again a matter of the same kind of flexibility. A little humility also, you know.

It's more, I think, a matter of cultivating humility and just being in general an affable and agreeable, nice enough person who can agree with his opponent, you see? Agree with his opponent and yet carry on with his own lifestyle, you know, without saying, "My lifestyle is better. Now I don't do it that way." Carry on with your own life style that you have chosen, quietly, and let your opponent find his own way. When you think he's ripe for a change, only then speak about anything, but not prematurely, you know. And as you cultivate humility this will happen, see? And people get bogged down; people get stuck; they don't get a response; they don't get a positive response because they themselves are not sure inside themselves. A lot of times we are trying to convince others because we are actually trying to convince ourselves, see. And there are these subliminal cues we give out, and our own resistances reflect in others and get thrown back at us in the form of the opponent's argument, see. And this happens all the time. If you are not succeeding in your communication, you just are not convinced about what you are communicating. If you are not succeeding in your communication, you just aren't convinced about what you are communicating, see. And if you are convinced about what you are communicating, then the least exertion is most effective. The least exertion is most effective. See? Try. Try least exertion in your communication, see. It works! Thank you.

Just go back to the first of the things that we said. Your success shows in whether the person continues to practice and wants to come back to something more afterwards. What I would like to see the Center teachers do . . . what some teachers are successfully doing is to let the Center permanent membership develop out of your classes, see. Not only teaching a class, but

representing the Center, you know, and creating that atmosphere with the least amount of evangelizing. Just dispensing helpful information. Okay. Thank you all.