

BROKEN GODS, BREAKING HEARTS

PEDESTALS, BOUNDARIES, PITFALLS

I would like to dedicate this to all teachers and students who have crossed my path. Thank you for your advice and your effort, your encouragement and your sustenance. I hope this article is helpful in our growth towards honesty, compassion and openness.

STARTING WITH A SONG

To start with words from a song by Katy Perry: “lost my discretion...caught my attention” (*I kissed a girl*). This article is an attempt to make sense of our relationships within the yoga world (particularly that of teacher/student). It proposes specific ways of dealing with some of the difficulties that arise within these relationships. And it is significantly inspired by what has been happening with John Friend and Anusara.

For those unfamiliar with the situation concerning Anusara, this is a yoga system set up in America in 1997 by John Friend. Its selling points were the three A’s: action, alignment and attitude. The practice came from an Iyengar background that was influenced by forms from Tantra. On the official website it stated that the ideology is “grounded in a Tantric philosophy of intrinsic goodness”. According to John Friend: “Anusara means flowing with grace, flowing with nature and following your heart”.

In the last fifteen years Anusara became a very major brand in the yoga marketplace and John Friend reached dizzying heights of yogi-celebrity. But this growth curve has been derailed by a series of revelations about his personal relationships with students and treatment of teachers within the system. (1) The brand has been greatly tarnished – another broken god lies at our feet.

I think in considering this situation, it is important to remember that we all live in glasshouses. By that, I mean we all commit acts that in retrospect we might regret: certainly this is true for me. I have definitely done actions that I might describe in terms of regret – that I wish I hadn’t done, hence those Katy Perry words. Those without making mistakes cast the first stone. Who can actually throw?

There is such a temptation here of scaremongering and sensationalism: the delight of gossip, the sheer excitement of a breaking story (especially one that involves sex scandals and financial dealings). We are easily caught up in the dramas when what is actually needed is calmness and compassion. I believe there is a responsibility to be even handed and level headed: taking a deep breath and letting it go in a long sigh. Then consider with clarity and wisdom what is to be done.

BIG BUSINESS

Yoga is big business – to paraphrase those punkers, it's turning spirituality into money. Ideas of freedom are means of swelling bank balances and boosting personal egos. Anusara is just one among others that has followed the McDonaldification of yoga: the practice becoming a commodity with business plans, mission statements, trademarks. But commodities inherently create a relationship of producer and consumer. One consequence of this process is that often yoga practitioners have a tendency to over-sell their goods. And through consumerism there can be a lessening of the therapeutic applications of yoga.

Did we ask for these systems of corporate yoga with their rabid competitiveness, these hybrids of religious cult/multi-level marketing organization, did we want the big yoga rock-star gurus and their groupies, the materialism and vanity, the enormous surfeit of stuff, the clothes and bags and straps and food bars and mats and headbands and smoothies? The answer is...yes, to at least some extent many of us did in some shape or form...

What marks out the supposed spiritual model from the more traditional capitalist structure is that they are frequently based on a cult of personality. Why are we so ready to give up our power? Why can't we see that when someone is opposed to mentions of other brands that this is then a warning light (this was part of John Friend's brand management). Doug Keller – who was involved with Anusara at the beginning and then left – wrote: “a specific group of people was assigned to closely follow my every statement in blogs...they would immediately denounce criticism...and even accuse me of ‘hate speech’...as well as suggest that I had a personality disorder.” A senior teacher within the system said: “Anusara is comprised of a collective of teachers, but only one man takes credit”. These are surely clear signs of something going wrong.

TONY SOPRANO DOES YOGA

It is worrying to read how the Anusara teachers agreed to give John Friend 10% of their earnings from other products. It is reminiscent of the Tony Soprano mode of business operations. And many of these same senior teachers knew what was happening behind the scenes but kept quiet: for fears of wrecking the financial fleet, their personal and emotional investments preventing them from speaking the truth. (2) Through their silence, they were complicit in the cover-up. Whatever happened to transparency – the yoga of yamas, in particular satya (truthfulness)? Where was that in the Anusara Yoga empire? And there is gentle irony in yoga teacher being a major league personality when actually a point of practice is to burn away these personalities.

I wonder what is it in human nature that makes so many of us give up our discriminative qualities. Do we think by following a leader it is going to be easier to get to the promised land? Habitually the leader does not challenge this false belief. In contrast to this pattern are the words of the Buddha on his deathbed: “be a light unto yourself”. We are wounded beings – this is the human condition, especially in the western world with its depths of low self-esteem and desperate search for acceptance.

In these wounds there can be addictions to attention and power that work both for leaders and followers. There is a need to understand the dynamics involved in these relationships. For example, for a teacher to become inflated, the student must inflate. Miles Neale (a

Buddhist psychotherapist) said that being a yoga teacher allows an insecure person to act spiritually secure: “people elevate because they want to be accepted by the one that’s elevated – that makes them feel good”.

This has happened many times before – the cult of personality and the corruption of power. There has been Amit Desai at Kripalu and Sai Baba in India and Swami Mutkananda of Siddha Yoga. (3) This is mirrored in the business world with figures such as Robert Maxwell, Bernie Madoff and Allen Stanford. (4) And in the ‘conventional’ religious world three examples are Jim Bakker, Jerry Falwell and Jimmy Swaggart. These are individuals who could be described as megalomaniacs in their thirst for powers and possessions.

One commentator wrote, “I’ve heard more applause at some Anusara workshops than I might hear at a concert... I’ve been invited to teach at ashrams where the brittleness of forced happiness, the plastered on smiles and the shying away of any discord is truly suffocating.” What can be seen in these structures is a depersonalised ‘tyrannical happiness’. There is a glittering spectacle that is the antitheses of models that encourage growth and development of students as autonomous beings. Whether someone is wearing an orange robe or a Saville Row suit, whether they are holding a christian cross or a yoga mat, the question is still the same: what are your true intentions?

APPETITES AND EGOS

In psychoanalysis, a definition of good mental health is a strong ego that is able to hold unconscious instinctual drives in check within accepted societal limits or boundaries. Boundaries are needed for creating and maintaining safety – they are necessary for ethical reasons and to establish integral behaviour. A challenge to these boundaries is behaviour that was succinctly described as “what drives some teachers to repeatedly put their own appetites ahead of their students’ welfare?”(5) In psychotherapy there is a clear rule that therapists do not have any form of relationship with client beyond the therapeutic encounter.

Talking personally, I often feel a general soft love towards everyone without exception in the class. Once in a rare while I might experience boredom in having to say ‘breathe’ again. Of course there are temptations. Of course there are many different feelings, a multitude of experiences. So there is a requirement for restraint, an observing of boundaries like in the psychotherapeutic environment. Or is that too rigid within the yoga context? On one level we just teach some stretching and some relaxing. Yet people come into class with their vulnerabilities and their exposures and these wounds of being human. And people come into class wearing clothes that can be revealing – there are games being played on both sides of the fence.

I contacted other male yoga teachers about this issue and responses were illuminating and instructive. One wrote: “it always seems like a bad idea to me at the time. Not because of any moral stance: I just rarely am attracted. Maybe just my low libido? Maybe because at the beginning when I did yoga classes it was with old ladies in cardigans.” Another said “I cured all my inappropriate sexual fantasy stuff over ten years now, and now have no such distractions passing through my mind and body, unless I choose them. What a gift... And if you believe that, well we're both as lost as each other.”

A teacher who runs trainings concisely declared: “how I view what I am doing why I am doing it and for whom makes a lot of difference to how I behave”. One told of this encounter with a private client: “I have recently decided to stop teaching a client who kept trying to cross my very clear professional boundaries. I personally prefer to keep my boundaries clear because I feel that my energy stays more concentrated during teaching and because up to now it has always felt like the right thing to do.”

CHALLENGING

This was from two long-established teachers: “I think it is very challenging to be a male teacher in a predominantly female world... Projection from student to teacher is a major issue across and within genders...Temptation will always be there, and denial of that fact is not being honest. It’s what we do with it that matters. My past mistakes have hopefully helped me behave in a clearer more compassionate and skillful manner. When I notice attraction or temptation rise, I try to just watch it and not react to it. Usually time and mindful observation of the why and wants results in the circumstance dissolving.”

The other wrote: “Nothing wrong with sex and attraction. In my two decades as a teacher I have been physically attracted to many students but have never acted on it. I would, though. The thing is, unless the student is mature enough to see through the power differential usually imposed on a Yoga teacher, then the teacher is taking advantage. Most male Yoga teachers are not mature enough in their sexuality and behaviour to be clean in a sexual relationship with a student. You might think you’re mature enough but if you have shame, guilt, embarrassment, strong beliefs, opinions, taboos, if sex isn’t as natural a process as eating food, if you’re not willing for your peers and community to know what you’re up to, then you most likely have issues around your sexuality. Nothing wrong with this. Simply reveals an immaturity and an area for more potential ease and freedom. For me, that has meant taking the role of teacher, facilitator and spiritual cheerleader before friend and especially lover. The relationship is about enlightenment before anything else.”

TEMPTATIONS

In a recent interview, Richard Freeman said, “I have known many friends who became teachers and degraded because they could not resist the sexual advantage that they have over their students... Other teachers are destructed by money and fame. This is how temptation comes. This is why a teacher should have friends or other people who give him feedback, who criticize them...in a healthy yoga lineage they always have at least the one who is equal to you, who laughs with you, or who tells you that you are doing something stupid.” This term ‘degraded’ can be an important description of what happens when we are seduced by temptations. A defining of ‘degraded’ is “humiliated and suffering a loss of status, reputation, or self-esteem; showing a decline in quality, standard, or performance”.

That earlier list of spiritual teachers, business figures and religious leaders shared one obvious fact: they are all men. But we need to be clear that this is not just a dynamic of male teacher on female students. I know of women yoga teachers who are sexually attracted to men in their classes, I know of men who have walked out of yoga classes because of inappropriate behaviour by women teachers, I know a senior woman teacher who while running a yoga training was having a secret sexual relationship with one of the trainees and treating him with significant favouritism (often secrecy is a sign of shame and indicates

actions that are out of integrity). There are examples of women yoga teachers sexually harassing men in class and plenty of cases where women in the role of teacher have made relationships with men attending their classes. These situations as well as between gender are also within gender – whether we are heterosexual or gay/lesbian we still have to deal with the realities of sexual attraction and balances of power.

But it has to be said there are definitely relationships that have successfully arisen from the teacher/student background. The Zen teacher Brad Warner talks about this in his books and blog: “The bad reasons that teachers screw their students have gotten a mountain of press in recent years...The idea that the student is forever and always the powerless victim in these relationships is ridiculous. The notion that such a relationship forever and always represents the betrayal of all the other students of that teacher is born solely out of jealousy and spite...it is essential that we give up the notion of teachers as gods and learn to regard them as ordinary people with ordinary needs for companionship and love.”(6)

Obviously power within relationships is fluid: one example is a male yoga teacher who met his wife-to-be at class. At the wedding, someone remarked “well, if he wants, he’ll now never have to make another decision in his life”. It is not simply about the teacher being more ‘powerful’ than the student. There is great individuality of relationships and there can be a danger in imposing models on such wide variations. And there is a clear difference between the teacher who forms a long-term relationship with one of their students and a teacher who has multiple intimate flings with students – this could be called three strikes and you’re out. Yet there is a need to note that it is easier for those in the comfort of these long-term relationships to be critical of the ones breaching boundaries.

We have to acknowledge the dangers of imposed discipline that can result in suppression of strong energies. Time and again this leads to secrets, inappropriate activities, explosions. (7) And we have to appreciate the strength of physical attractions – David Deida who writes on spiritual growth and sacred intimacy said: “if you are a heterosexual man with a true masculine essence, then you will be more or less constantly attracted to feminine women... how do you turn this potential sexual problem into a spiritual gift?”

TRANSCENDING

The Dalai Lama was asked if it is ever possible for a Buddhist teacher to have sexual contact with a student and not cause harm. His response was that the exception might be a person possessed of such clarity that they had transcended the duality of attraction and aversion so that he or she could drink urine and eat faeces. I am confident that I would fail this particular test...

An approach of Chogyam Trungpa (an influential Tibetan master) was that the role of the teacher is to break a student’s heart. The student falls in love with the teacher and the teacher reflects that back to the student without becoming romantically involved with them. The result is their heart is broken and in the tenderness of that breaking, they fall in love with themselves. I felt that happen with one of my teachers, as at the start there was almost infatuation. After a period of time, I saw her as a human being like all of us, thus falling off that pedestal on which I had placed her. Now it is a more balanced and mature relationship

but the whole process took about eight years. This is an example of the need for consistency in teacher/student relationships and it applies to both sides.

But this breaking of hearts: are we expected to do that after one weekend training? Or just because we can stick our legs behind our heads? This could be one of the great difficulties: the limited training that many of us get as yoga teachers. It's not about 200 or even 500 hours of training – it's about thousands and thousands and thousands of hours of training (you could call this practice). Yet still, as John Friend and others have demonstrated, we make mistakes. In psychotherapy schools the training is often five years and after that you have to continue to be supervised.

There is a lack of such supervision within yoga teaching and there can be significant benefits in this support. Michael Stone (who has been teaching for more than ten years and written several books) said “I see a supervisor every two weeks...who offers much guidance when I'm entangled or confused or irritated in my relationships with students (which is often).” Despite all the years of practice and encountering people in the class environment, still “entangled or confused or irritated”.

This is a proposal for teachers – to establish structures of supervision (perhaps as part of teacher training, after graduation there is a year of continuing supervision). An example of supervision is to see a therapist. And one practical idea is to encourage peer groups. Remember those words of Richard Freeman earlier: be with fellow teachers where there is both transparency and critiquing with kindness. I have found this to be very helpful – and it is instructive that teachers such as John Friend and Bikram Choudhury do not appear to have had such mutual support.

ESSENCES OF TEACHING

I used to think that the primary qualities for teaching yoga were humility, kindness and reliability: but I now realise it is so much more than that. I used to joke then that no-one should teach yoga if they were under 30 or came from a dance background: but I now realise that there are some wonderful teachers who fall into both of those groups.

An essence of teaching is the ability to stay stable where there is an experiencing of emotional and mental balance. It is about maintaining a significant degree of attention throughout the entirety of class – I can feel when my attentiveness wanders. And this level of attention is much greater than when I used to work in offices (where there was space for toilet breaks, cigarette breaks, chatting with mates, reading the paper though that was the 1990s!). It is essential to be knowledgeable yet not afraid of expressing that don't know mind. There can be great freedom in saying “I don't know” but we have to know a lot before being able to say such a statement with confidence.

There is the non-negotiable of having a teacher – so as well as still actively learning, we know that there are no glass ceilings and there are continual possibilities of polishing and refining. The potential is that this teacher is a constant reminder of other layers as a means of humbling the ego which can be fed by adoration from students. There has to be a process of reflection that comes from a place of confidence rather than insecurities and uncertainties.

This of course can take a very long time – like a lifetime. But humbly, slowly we can just try to do our best, recognising our weak spots, hearing the occasional adulation without drowning (so we are not besotted by the propaganda that might be placed at our lotus feet). As teachers, we have to conduct ourselves in a conscientious manner, creating environments that are safe and supportive for the practice of yoga. These could be some marks of a teacher. (8)

PRAISING AND RAISING

As these teachers, we need to bear in mind some words from the Dalai Lama: “too much obedience, devotion and blind acceptance on the part of a student spoils a teacher”. This is a message spelt out by others – like Yogi Mammoyanand (author of *Sivananda Buried Yoga*): “in my opinion, the greatest misfortune that can happen to a yogi is his followers. Followers inevitably raise the status of a yogi to a level that is difficult to resist. The more people praise and raise him, the more he gets carried away with the glory of his own false image.”

But the peer groups can keep us in check, encouraged and supported by those in similar boats. And supervision: why not? It’s what happens in the therapy world. This can all help us to stay within the boundaries, to avoid those pitfalls and the pedestals. To acknowledge the fact that we are fallible and flawed beings on paths of awareness.

In the texts of yoga such as *Gheranda Sambhita* (17th century), there is a description of what is described as ‘the six enemies’: desire, anger, greed, illusion, infatuation and envy. In *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (15th century) there are the six yogic virtues that can bring success: courage, daring, perseverance, discriminative knowledge, faith and aloofness from company (9). The *Bhagavad Gita* (1st century) talks of an enlightened person being “friendly and compassionate, free from self-regard and vanity”. A literary perspective is from the 19th century Swiss writer Robert Walser: “who can ever feel at ease when he cares about the world’s praise and admiration?”

INFORMING A REVOLUTION

The Anusara situation first came to public notice via the web. The Internet has been an astonishing democratising of information: from the Arab Spring to Wikileaks, we have become vastly more able to share than just 20 years ago. In reference to the ongoing wave of immolations by Tibetan protesters, a monk said, “with the internet everyone now hears about the protests, the burnings – that is a huge change”.

This information revolution goes against the grain of hierarchies, gurus, dictators: imperialists building empires in the shadow of secrets. In these shadows are the inner circles shrouded in secrecy with their classified knowledge. A contrast to this is the approach of accessibility for all where there is a stripping away of restrictions and a direct path. John Friend wrote in a private letter that was subsequently released on the world wide web: “I have always considered myself intelligent and clever, and so I easily could create my own world even if I had to shrewdly cut corners since I would not get caught”. This open accessing of information can inspire a practice that has been eloquently described as “no place in our heart for a lie to hide”. Of course we are all fumbling our ways towards truthfulness but there is a glaring contradiction between spiritual practice and engagement in lying, publicly upholding particular principles while privately cutting corners.

As much as there is this requirement for satya, surely an essence of yoga is a localism rather than imperialism. It is these brands that are the empires. It is these brands that are built around the charismas that virtually always have such sizeable clay feet. It is these brands that assiduously promote lifestyle when what we are longing for is life. Empires have to defend brands so there is a lessening of dialogue and a developing of borders – this defensiveness can be a real obstacle on paths of growing. The expansion of empire becomes more important than the practices and the principles upon which it was first built: like samadhi that is then strangled by commodification. How can 800 people in one room revering a yogi-celebrity translate into moksha? (10)

But for some this was undoubtedly their community and Anusara did establish itself as a yoga identity that met many people's need for connection. The difficulty is that this community emerged from a business plan that was modelled on corporate structures. The community was strongly hierarchical and it is common that when there is one personality, there are problems of power and corruption of position. A contrast is community where there is a drawing together of equals, without rigid hierarchies, that is centred on self-governing and self-empowering.

Perhaps what we could look for is when the buck becomes more important than the practice, where there is a fixation on quantities and growth and a losing of qualities and understanding. In the words of Matthew Remski: "it is very important for all of us that yoga transforms from a consumer cult into a community culture". Perhaps this situation will help us to grow up and become more mature. Rather than brands of yoga (whether that is the now diminishing Anusara version or ones such as Bikram Yoga, Jivamukti Yoga, Jois Yoga) there becomes open source yoga: less reliant on celebrity headlines and more present in our own practices.

In radical sociology there are the terms 'symbolic value' and 'use value'. Instead of a symbolic value (where yoga is a sign of status, a signalling of social identity, a communicator of success), yoga becomes back to what it actually is: use value. We live in this society of symbolic values and look how temples are falling down around our ears – what we urgently require is use values. A practice that helps us to be happy and healthy, a practice that helps us to connect to community rather than build more borders.

MIRROR, MIRROR

I have to look at myself – I need to face my own shadows because if I don't, then I will continue to see them in others as the world outside me is a reflection of the world inside me. What drives my interest in this situation? Maybe it is a good reminder of the requirement for self-restraint. I am fascinated by this human condition. I am interested in analysing what we are doing, how we are doing, who we actually are. And through this process of writing, I have become more conscious: more alert to the importance of ethics, more aware of boundaries.

Teachers are indispensable as guides on these paths as they can teach us new ways of behaving, thinking and being. The teacher can be a model: an example that we respect, a person who through their dedication to practice and the practice of teaching assists us in our own growth, a person to whom we experience a deep connection, a person who embodies

fairness and honesty in dealings with other people. Yet we also need to realise that we can outgrow a particular teacher or their style of teaching – and then we find another person to deepen our inquiry and encourage our integrity. And the great challenge is to acknowledge that ultimately we are ourselves entirely responsible for cutting through the binds that tie us down, our addictions to certain behavioural patterns, our lack of clarity and sometimes loss of courage, our failing to live up to what we hope we could be.

To grow requires curiosity, engagement and awareness – when we resist or think we know this only perpetuates a way of being and our patterns. This could be a lesson about the need for skill in suggestions and recognition of the many facets of our being. Then we could think if we lead our spiritual life ‘the right way’, all will be fine: unfortunately this is far from the truth. The truth is that rather than a path to ever-increasing tranquillity and joy, there can be an exposing of unfinished business and unresolved traumas pushing up from the depths. Maybe if this is not happening, it might be a sign of what has been called ‘spiritual bypassing’: where we use our practices as a way of creating a superior identity and hiding ourselves from the stings of suffering that are intrinsic for this human condition. (11)

The fallout will continue – much space has been devoted to John Friend and Anusara. The question is what can we learn from this? It is always good to look thoughtfully on relationships as the entirety of this path is relationship: community. We have to avoid the tendency to let mistakes be overlooked because frequently it is in these mistakes that we are learning. We have to keep our eyes open for those abuses and corruptions.

I believe that the empire constructs undermine connections. I believe that a breach of boundaries can create significant difficulties. In such actions, there is often secrecy behind which there can be a feeling of shame that can then drive us to act inappropriately and unethically. As well as behaving with integrity, there is a requirement for clearness: can we be open and honest about what we are doing? It is the teacher’s responsibility to see and not touch, to hold the space without bringing in their own unmet needs: tough but true. Of course we are human beings with our needs and our hurts and our fears and our hopes – and for practice to be helpful for us to deal with these very real issues, we require openness and transparency and clarity and wisdom. Did anyone say it would be easy?

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For more writings, go:

http://www.yogawithnorman.co.uk/writings_yoga_with_norman.html.

Thanks to the dozen male yoga teachers who responded to my request to talk about their experiences and feelings on this subject: your honesty was an inspiration to me. Thanks to all the pieces and posts on websites such as www.yogadork.com and www.elephantjournal.com: these have been sources of information and insight. Thanks to those who gave skilful and valuable feedback.

FOOTNOTES

1. <http://www.yogadork.com/news/first-public-interview-with-john-friend-in-response-to-accusations/>. And this is an excellent piece: <http://www.yogadork.com/texas-monthly-downward-dog-by-mimi-swartz/>.

2. Amy Ippolitti: “We all knew that John was dating his employees and students...”

3. For more details on Amit Desai, there’s ‘Bringing Yoga Home’ by Stephen Cope; for Sai Baba go to <http://saibabaexposed.blogspot.co.uk/2006/11/guardians-sensational-sai-scandal.html> – and go www.leavingsiddhayoga.net for Swami Mutkananda.

4. Robert Maxwell committed suicide in 1991 after stealing about £500million from his companies; Bernie Madoff admitted the largest financial fraud in U.S. history and was sentenced to 150 years in prison in 2009; Allen Stanford was recently convicted with fraud of \$7billion.

5. Bodhin Kjolhede (abbot at Rochester Zen Centre):

“What drives some teachers to repeatedly put their own appetites ahead of their students’ welfare? ...we have to suspect that repeat offenders have some hole within them that they are trying compulsively to fill, an aching sense of incompleteness that drives them to act against their students’ interests and their own better nature. To see persistent misconduct on the part of a teacher as the flailings of a wounded healer may help us to understand and even forgive him for it, but their behaviour can’t be excused. Too many people get hurt. Many years ago, some of us were pressing a teacher about his series of sexual involvements with his students, finally prompting this jaunty reply from him: ‘you know, just because you’re enlightened doesn’t mean you’re dead below the waist’. Message: if you have a healthy libido, you can be excused for acting on your urges. Worst of all is when such teachers let themselves be referred to as zen ‘masters’. No one deserves such a title until having earned it through long-term self-mastery.”

6. Brad Warner from *Zen wrapped in karma dipped in chocolate*:

“...most of us in this spiritual teacher game are deeply nerdy people. Lots of us could never score with the opposite sex (or the same sex, for those who prefer that) until we reach a position of authority, thereby becoming suddenly attractive, even though we spent most of our lives being ignored or laughed at. A starving man or woman will tend to gorge him- or her-self if suddenly faced with a smorgasbord. The same thing happens to rock stars, actors and artists but they usually get away with it. But there are also some good reasons spiritual teachers seem to end up in the sack with their students so often. Those of us who teach this so-called spiritual stuff are deeply interested in it. Lots of us have invested our whole lives in it. It’s really hard to find someone else who shares that kind of passion for self-exploration, and when you meet someone who does it’s almost always a student. The romantic bonds that develop in these cases between teachers and students are often every bit as deep and true as those shared in any other relationship...”

7. A yoga scholar, Mikel Burley, wrote:

“Attitudes to sex and sexuality within the milieu of contemporary yoga are both confused and confusing. A twisted skein of opinions and imagery obtains, wherein we find, for example, idealizations of chastity and asceticism, often couched in neo-Puritanical terminology competing with eroticized depictions of the yogic body and advertisements for yoga’s capacity to enhance sexual performance and orgasmic ecstasy. The overall effect is a confusing mélange of messages for the aspiring yoga student...this confusion is symptomatic of the blending of a rather superficial understanding of a diverse range of yogic traditions on the one hand, with certain cultural trends, such as commercialism, and the

emphasis on desirable physicality, on the other.”

8. Much of the previous three paragraphs were inspired by Robert Birnberg

(<http://www.longexhale.com>):

“The classical texts describe the essential qualities of a good Yoga teacher. Sthitadhi/mauni: mentally and emotionally stable, quiet. Someone reflective and responsible. The teacher shouldn’t leak or complain to the students about their own problems (often the mark of a teacher-less teacher). A good teacher has the ability to listen with complete attention, empathize, and give appropriate, non-reactive advice while remaining detached from the results. Jnani/sampradaya sevaka: authoritative, yet knows their limits, has a teacher of their own. A teacher should be quite knowledgeable, yet truthful about what they don’t know. They should demonstrate a deep understanding of the *Yoga Sutras*, and a comfortable command of Yoga’s various tools, applications, adaptations, modifications and their effects. While no one is expected to know everything, a teacher connected to a teacher connected to a teacher has access to the entire lineage's body of knowledge and experience, and is constantly having their knowledge and skills reshaped, refined and tested for accuracy.”

9. *Gheranda Samhita* translated by Sri K Pattabhi Jois: shada ripu – kama, krodha, lobha, moha, mada, matsarya. And *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* I.16.

10. Samadhi: “...the sustained experience of concentration in which there is complete integration of subject and object, revealing pure awareness as the nondual substratum of reality”; moksha: “the spiritual goal of release from reincarnation”.

11. In the words of John Welwood:

“Spiritual bypassing is a term I coined to describe a process I saw happening in the Buddhist community I was in, and also in myself. Although most of us were sincerely trying to work on ourselves, I noticed a widespread tendency to use spiritual ideas and practices to sidestep or avoid facing unresolved emotional issues, psychological wounds, and unfinished developmental tasks. When we are spiritually bypassing, we often use the goal of awakening or liberation to rationalize what I call premature transcendence: trying to rise above the raw and messy side of our humanness before we have fully faced and made peace with it. And then we tend to use absolute truth to disparage or dismiss relative human needs, feelings, psychological problems, relational difficulties, and developmental deficits.”