

I first met Guruji in the skylight ballroom of the Puck building in downtown New York City. It was pure magic – the sun rising, Guruji counting in Sanskrit, “the language of the Gods,” hundreds of people breathing in unison. I was twenty years old and had been practicing ashtanga yoga for a few years, but those mornings I felt something deep within me begin to awaken. I was filled with a sense of peace and inner happiness I had never experienced before. Afterwards I went up to say thank you and he said to me, “You come to Mysore?” I wondered if he was really talking to me, until his question became an imperative: “You come to Mysore!” Soon after, I left Cooper Union, where I was studying engineering, and bought a ticket to Mysore; it was the easiest decision of my life.

The first of Patañjali’s *Yoga Sūtras*, the classic text on the eight-limbed path of aṣṭāṅga yoga, says:

*atha yogānuśāsanam* ||YS 1.1||

**Now, at this auspicious time, for the student who is ready, there is the teaching of Yoga.<sup>1</sup>**

I learned so much from Guruji that first trip, in many different ways – how to trust and surrender, to begin to let go of my fear and attachment, to heal old wounds. He had this remarkable way of making the Sanskrit come to life, of making these ancient enigmatic teachings simple and understandable. Guruji used to sit every afternoon and read the paper and we were always welcome; sometimes he would talk, sometimes we would just sit in silence. I listened to him reciting Sanskrit verses and was intrigued by the powerful vibration and lyrical quality inherent in the language. I started studying Sanskrit that trip, walking around singing the alphabet, loving the feeling of the new sounds rolling off of my tongue.

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<sup>1</sup> All translations are my own.

I went home and attempted to continue to study Sanskrit on my own from a book. I succeeded for about six months, but eventually gave up without a teacher. I did this for a few years, renewing my inspiration every time I went to Mysore, slowly losing my momentum upon going home. Finally, I decided to immerse myself in it and returned to school at Columbia University to study Sanskrit and South Asian Culture. As Guruji always used to say:

*sa tu dirgha kāla nairantarya satkāraśevito dr̥ḍha bhūmiḥ* ||YS 1.14||

**And that practice achieves firm ground when it is practiced for a long time, without interruption, and with devotion.**

Or as he would say in answer to many questions, “You take practice, practice, practice, all is coming.” It is true for yoga and certainly for Sanskrit as well. One day I listened to Guruji speak in the group conference he would give on Sunday afternoons, and realized with amazement that I understood the Sanskrit sayings. Slowly, all I had heard him reciting for years was beginning to make sense.

Three years ago I started studying Kannada, as well. I convinced my professor at Columbia that I would need it as a research language, but really I just wanted to understand those cryptic conversations (or arguments, we really never knew) that Guruji and Sharath would have over our heads. I read part of the original Kannada version of “Yoga Māla”, Guruji’s book, beginning to understand phrases he would use that must be direct, literal English translations of the Kannada. Last year in Mysore, I was able to speak to Guruji in Kannada; when I went to say goodbye for what would be the last time, I was able to converse with him. The big smile he gave me and his laughter were well worth my efforts. To be able to understand a little bit of Guruji in his mother tongue helped me to appreciate him even more. I only wish I had learned sooner.

This summer I went to Mysore for Guruji's memorial. On his birthday I went to the old yoga shala in Lakshmipuram; stirred with memories in the room where we used to practice, I could almost see Guruji sitting on his stool in the corner. I woke up the next morning with the burning desire to study Sanskrit again, a desire which has been oddly absent these last couple of years while he was sick. As I finish my master's thesis, translating and writing about a text on Yoga and Āyurveda, I am filled with the realization that without Guruji I would never have embarked upon this path. Every time I practice, I hear Guruji's voice in my head and feel his touch; when I teach I look down at my hands and see him in them. As much as I miss him, I am full of gratitude. Even in his physical absence I know Guruji will be with me forever.