

Swami Kripalu's Inspiration for Yoga Teachers

Swami Kripalu (1913-1981) was a remarkable man, a bridge between the traditions of ancient India and contemporary Western society. A yoga master renowned in India for the intensity of his spiritual practice and the depth of his compassion, Swami Kripalu came to America in 1977 where he spent the last four years of his life in residence at the original Kripalu Center.

Maintaining his schedule of ten hours of Kundalini Yoga meditation per day, Swami Kripalu taught a small number of close disciples including Yogi Amrit Desai, the originator of Kripalu Yoga. He also made weekly public appearances that catalyzed the growth of the Kripalu Yoga community. In these ways, Swami Kripalu played an essential role in the transmission of a spiritually potent yoga tradition to a large community of Western practitioners.

An articulate speaker and talented musician, it was Swami Kripalu's genuine love for people that set him apart. His singing stirred deep feelings of devotion within the hearts of listeners. Discourses were peppered with captivating stories, eliciting tears of sorrow and peals of uncontrollable laughter. A prolific writer, Swami Kripalu wrote books of practical spiritual guidance aimed at uplifting the lives of his many devotees. Radiating a palpable energy of compassionate love and spiritual power, few came into Swami Kripalu's presence without being touched, moved or changed in some way.

Swami Kripalu returned to India in 1981 and died shortly thereafter. Held dear by a multitude of Indians and Westerners, Swami Kripalu's death was honored as the passing of a humanitarian saint. His teachings on yoga practice and supportive lifestyle still form the basis of the Kripalu Yoga approach. The following quotes were drawn from a number of sources and convey a small portion of his guidance to yoga students. While remaining true to Swami Kripalu's original teachings, they have been edited and in some places paraphrased to make their meaning more accessible.



On The Need for Practice

To read uplifting books or listen to spiritual discourses is good. But to practice even a little is of the utmost importance. The profound meaning of yoga is understood only by those who study it through regular and systematic practice. The day you start to practice, your true progress will begin.

Accepting the truth proclaimed by the scriptures does not produce knowledge. Real knowledge is only obtained through personal experience. For experience, practice is indispensable.

Through various yoga experiences, a seeker goes on intensifying his faith, courage, knowledge, zeal and devotion. In this way, he progresses on the path of yoga, gaining the knowledge of yoga through the practice of yoga.

Do not give up virtuous conduct and self-discipline, even in the face of death. Keep unflinching faith in the Lord and continue to practice mantra repetition, chanting, meditation, pranayama, postures, observing holy vows, fasting, moderation in diet, scripture study and other disciplines. I extend my blessings to everyone. (Farewell speech before returning to India 9/27/81.)

On Yama and Niyama

The scriptures of all the religions have given attention to the principles contained in yama and niyama. By genuinely pursuing yama and niyama, anyone can prosper materially and spiritually. The success achieved by influential men and women in their various fields is founded upon the practice of these principles. I can confidently state that anyone who ignores yama and niyama is clearly stunting his or her own development.

Yama and niyama build a person's character so thoroughly that by sincerely practicing them one ceases to be an animal, grows into a real human being, and can even transform into the Lord. Although their practice is arduous, fear is unwarranted because we are required to practice yama and niyama to the best of our capacity.

By firmly grasping the flower of a single virtue, a person can lift the entire garland of yama and niyama.

On Hatha Yoga

The body is stimulated by proper exercise, which both strengthens and relaxes. We all must travel a long distance in this physical body. If we do not care for it, how can we reach our goal?

The body benefits most when the postures are performed consciously and with full understanding. It takes time to accomplish difficult postures. Avoid forcing the body into them prematurely. Work into them gradually. Otherwise, the body can be harmed.

Pranayama is the king of all exercises. Under conditions of heightened respiration, the heart, arteries, capillaries, veins, and lungs perform many day's labor in only a few hours. As blood circulation increases, basic nutrients are distributed to all the tissues in the body. Waste products accumulating in the cells are eliminated into the veins. Indeed, one can comprehend the significance of all forms of exercise by understanding this process alone. The body parts are moved merely to churn and stimulate the respiratory process.

Kripalu Yoga is the most advantageous practice for a person living an active life in society. Success in life

Swami Kripalu had a profound sense of the specialness of each person, each object, each thing that his eyes rested on. Everything was alive to him. Everything had a life of its own, and Swami Kripalu acknowledged that life and cherished it. He referred to objects as "brother pen" or "sister sandal" and spoke with them. One day while riding in a car, Swami Kripalu looked out the window and said, "God is in everything. Do you see the glory of God in everything?" For Swami Kripalu, these weren't just nice thoughts. He was actually in relationship and communion with everything.

-Ila Sarley

requires both mind power (chitta) and life force (prana) Chitta and prana usually work independently. While waking, chitta is dominant and controls the body. While sleeping, prana is dominant and controls the body. While practicing Kripalu Yoga, a smooth flow of attention is maintained on the body while gracefully passing from posture to posture. Through regular practice, prana awakens. Chitta and prana become friends of equal strength who cooperate closely with one another.

The uniqueness of Kripalu Yoga is that postures, breath regulation, introversion, concentration, and meditation are all happening simultaneously. In the beginning stages, the practice of postures is primary and the other aspects of yoga are secondary. In the final stage, meditation is the primary experience.

Asanas performed with a deep sensitivity to the breath are ten times more beneficial than those without breath awareness.

The cause of all agitation is the constant modification of mind. The mind easily becomes concentrated and one-pointed through the practice of yoga. When control of the mind is obtained, the kingdom of peace is established.

On Struggle and Difficulties

In the entire world, there is not one human being who is free from pain. Even in favorable conditions, a person encounters struggle. The external form of struggle appears to be cruel. Some describe it as a horrible demon, but its nature is not malicious. Struggle keeps us from being sluggish. It keeps us aware and in the end bestows true knowledge. Struggle is actually an angel and the well-wisher of everyone.

It is proper to welcome struggle. Its arrival is always auspicious. Struggle changes a sub-human into an ideal person. It transforms an ordinary human into a spiritually-awake person respected by the world. Struggle is a subtle sculptor who shapes the life of every great spiritual master into a unique and unparalleled work of art.

Difficulties are bound to come. Just sitting still,

difficulties appear all around you. Difficulties get in the way when you act. If there were no difficulties, you would never realize your inner strength. Strength is always within us, but it only comes out when difficulty appears. When difficulties arise, do not stop. Instead, continue on your way by having faith in God.

Seekers who believe they must practice yoga only in the meditation room are under a great illusion. They must practice yoga in society as well. Practicing yoga in the meditation room is easy because there are no external disturbances. But one encounters many disturbances while practicing yoga in society, which makes it very difficult. The true yogi is one who can successfully protect his mental steadiness while in society.

On Purification and Growth

Physical waste products are often not excreted completely. They go on collecting in the body. In the same way, negative ideas accumulate in the mind. Purifying the body and the mind is not as easy as one might think. It is necessary to be very patient.

A significant number of earnest spiritual seekers take up the practice of yoga. Unfortunately many stop because exactly the right things happen.

Growth can only be gradual. The seed that is sown today does not sprout into a tree the next day. It does so only in the course of time, at its own pace, and by its own order.

Do not wrestle with a fault that you want to remove. Wrestling increases the disturbance of the mind and allows the excited fault to lift you up and slam you to the ground. Unable to pull yourself up to fight again, you will eventually give up the fight forever. The best way to remove a fault is to practice

I did not know what a human being could be until I met Swami Kripalu. I did not have a role model. I never knew compassion until I saw him.

-Dayashakti Scherer

Purification

The yoga tradition views the transformative process as an intensive housecleaning of the entire system called purification. This purification is more than cleansing the physical body of the impurities and imbalances that stand in the way of vibrant health. It also aims to remove the subtle impurities that render the mind unsteady, and even more subtle impurities said to obscure the inner light of the soul from shining forth.

Prior to practicing yoga, many individuals live a sedentary lifestyle coupled with poor eating and lifestyle habits. Eating too much, exercising too little, and abusing substances causes the body to produce more wastes than it can eliminate. As wastes accumulate in the tissues and cells, the body becomes heavily laden with what yoga calls mala and holistic health refers to as toxins. In addition to physical impurities, yoga teaches that there are more subtle emotional and mental impurities called vikshepa that dull awareness. When the world is viewed through a thick filter of emotional baggage and mental clutter, it is impossible to see reality clearly.

The prescription to remedy this situation is regular yoga practice and supportive lifestyle. Regular exercise and moderate eating allows the body to begin gradually eliminating its backlog of physical impurities. The practice of yoga enhances this natural process by stimulating blood circulation and organ function. Physical impurities that undermine health are flushed from the tissues to enter the blood stream and be eliminated by the liver and kidneys. Mental and emotional impurities that render the mind unsteady are similarly stimulated to rise from the unconscious and enter the stream of conscious awareness where they can be felt fully, seen clearly and released. This is where Swami Kripalu's emphasis on self-observation without judgment comes in. It is the secret to allowing unconscious material to surface and be released both on and off the yoga mat. As body and mind are purified, vitality increases and awareness naturally expands.

-Shobhan Richard Faulds

its opposite virtue. Practicing virtue decreases mental restlessness and increases happiness. Eradicate your bad character traits by strengthening good character traits.

On Self-Observation

The highest spiritual practice is self-observation without judgment.

Self-observation cannot be done perfectly right away. It takes time, as you have to pass through stages and learn it gradually. When performing actions, allow a part of the mind to observe yourself objectively. At first you see only your faults and lower qualities, which is why you must always do your self-observation with love. Gradually you begin to recognize there are good qualities also. By letting go of lower qualities, higher qualities naturally come in and go on increasing. One must sincerely want to see his faults and increase his good qualities. As long as that determination is not firm, self-observation is not possible.

Self-observation brings us closer to truth. When the mind is steady, we can see a little truth. When the mind is disturbed, we can't see anything. Growth allows a portion of the mind to remain an objective witness even in a disturbed state. The witness is always there, if one can keep a wakeful attitude in one's self.

On Love

Truly, the wise proclaim that love is the only path, love is the only God, and love is the only scripture. Only love can bring unity and remove the separation between all living beings. Only love purifies the body and mind. Love is not far away; it is as close as

Swami Kripalu had just finished giving darshan, still ruminating on the teaching he had just given, and he arrived at a conclusion. He wrote on his slate: "It's just love. There is nothing else. There is just love."

-Dinabandhu Sarley

Lineage Holders

What does it mean to hold the teachings of past masters? Links in a chain that stretches back in time, we walk the fine line between honoring what came before and birthing a new vision as vast as the dance of the deities.

What keeps a lineage vibrant, enlivens practices with the energy of truth and transformation? What weaves individual souls into the whole cloth of tradition, and a great work moving forward through the ages?

It is remembrance and the willingness to let go of form. It is bold dreams and fearless action. It is taking the teachings into the fray of everyday life, saying yes to what the moment holds. It is intractable chaos and creative commitment. It is blazing a trail, bushwhacking in the dark without a flashlight. It is riding a wave of truth with the power to change the landscape and the lives of all it touches.

Whether we chose the path or it chose us, we can shake the dust from our feet and walk forward - each step a part of the lineage unfolding.

-Danna Faulds

your heart. You can find it living there without walking a single step. Love is my only path. I am, in fact, a pilgrim on the path of love.

We can love no matter where we are. We can love under any circumstances, whether we have our arms and legs straight, or we are lying down, whether we are sitting or walking. We could be doing anything. The only thing is that we simply have to keep our mind attuned to God. There are two things which help love to increase and those are self-control and good character or right behavior.

The major characteristic of love is the absence of conflict. When conflict is born and increases daily, true love gradually diminishes. Where conflict finds fault, love sees virtue. When love increases daily, its flower blossoms fully, spreading its sweet fragrance everywhere.

The highest religious principle is Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam: the whole world is one family. No matter what religion we are following, if we cannot love others then we are not following religion but the illusion of religion. Where there is no unity, no love, no harmony among each other, how can there be religion?

On Service

Love is the seed, surrender the bud, and service the fruit. Serving others is such an effective method for attaining personal growth that it excels any other means that may be employed.

Serve with a full heart. By making others happy, you make yourself happy. The key to your heart lies hidden in the heart of the another.

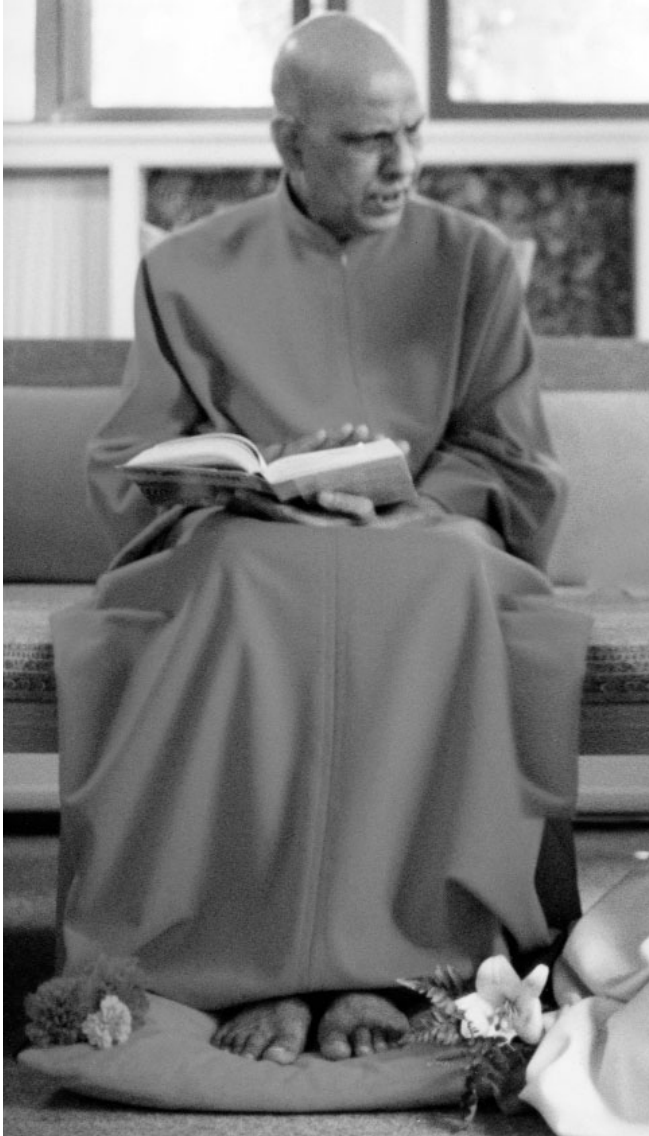
The nectar in the heart of an individual is not for himself. It is for others. As we serve others this nectar, its flow into our own heart goes on increasing. Our family and friends are thirsty for love. If we do not offer them our cup of love, the reservoir of our heart will become an impure and a poisoned reservoir. Go on giving love to your loved ones until they are fully satisfied. Then they also will never leave you unsatisfied.

Ending blessing:

Swami Kripalu always ended his public discourses with a blessing such as the one that follows:

May everyone here be happy.
May everyone here be healthy.
May everyone here be prosperous.
May no one be the least little bit unhappy at all.
My auspicious blessing to you.

Quotations from Swami Kripalu compiled by Danna Faulds, and edited by Shobhan Richard Faulds. Design by Derek Hansen. If you found these quotations valuable, send an e-mail to kyta@kripalu.org to let us know that you would like more of these.



I have never loved anyone like I loved Swami Kripalu. I have never met anyone who was so completely enchanted. We rode on his every word, his every breath, and every emotion he felt. It was as though we were all part of him.

He opened up a world I have not experienced before or since. This was most clearly conveyed to me through his ability to teach powerful messages with such simple, childlike stories. If I were to tell those same stories, people might think them simplistic and say, "Good story. So what?"

It was the way Swami Kripalu told them. Because of the power of his sadhana, he embodied universal truths that came alive through his stories. We felt, as we listened to him tell those stories, that we, too, embodied that truth. He literally transported the whole room back to an ancient time, back to whatever locale in which a story took place. He told each story with the love of a mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, God and child, all combined. He was an ocean of love, and he moved people like an ocean.

When he cried while telling a story, we all cried, every one of us. And when he laughed, we all laughed, full, deep, rich laughs. When he was leading up to a point, every one of us would be on the edge of our seats. We hung on every word. It was very much like how it is to be with an infant. Every moment is magical and special. You didn't want to miss anything.

-Ila Sarley