

Wednesday, 18 March, 2020

## TRUTH & TRANSFORMATION IN THE AQUARIAN AGE

In Aquarius, all of us, and all of our cultural institutions, are subject to a revision within the Aquarian imperative. To shift our nature into the heart.

The litany of allegations of the misuse and abuse of power, manipulation and sexual abuse by Yogi Bhanan following the publication of Premka's book are a horrifying narrative of predatory behavior. There is never justification for such action by any human being; when a spiritual teacher is accused of such conduct it breaks the sacred trust between teacher and student. There are now throughout our global community outpourings of anger, confusion, rage, pain and grief by those who feel used, betrayed, and humiliated.

It is vitally important that the voices of the victims be heard, shared, and believed. And needless to say, appropriate restitution and reparation should then be made.

I became involved with Kundalini Yoga in 1978/1979 in London. There were very few students and we developed our practice as best we could. In time, about 1980, I met Yogi Bhanan and received my name. I began teaching and helped to build a community. For me, it was a fairly benign and positive experience, an unsettlingly stark contrast to those of the victims of Yogi Bhanan's abuse in retrospect.

During the 90's I would host Yogi Bhanan and his entourage at my home during his teaching trips to the UK. I personally saw no evidence of inappropriate behavior, but perceived only a determined yogi working 20-hour days, meeting politicians, dignitaries, and religious figures between teaching workshops for us students. Yogi Bhanan was also 100% supportive, kind, and loyal to me during a time of personal crisis. "You have always stood up for me and now I am standing up for you," he said.

I experienced very few instances of low-level pressure and manipulations from Yogi Bhanan and the Sangat during my relationship with Kundalini Yoga. From Yogi Bhanan himself, there was only one instance in which he requested that I go to Australia to distribute Yogi Tea. I never went. He never mentioned it again. There was a small

amount of pressure from some Sangat members to send my kids to the Miri Piri school. Our parental opinion was that the school was not academically sound at the time and the boys did not want to go, so we took a family decision that they stay in the UK. It was our free choice to raise our kids close to us. There was also low-level pressure to pay the tithe or Dasvandh, which I did intermittently. Likely by some combination of circumstance and privilege - geography, socioeconomic standing, gender, etc. - my experience in the UK scene was benign, and I was fortunate enough to be able to retain my critical faculties and participate at a level I felt comfortable with, with little to no difficulty. I still do.

I share my experiences not to invalidate the trauma or atrocities suffered by Premka and others, but because this is, rightly, a time of demystification. Of acknowledgement of paradox and of grey area, and of dredging up the darkness and exposing it to light. Bearing in mind, of course, the tremendous privileges that affect the way in which I move through the world, being a white, educated, European, middle class man - with a family and support network of my own - it is worth noting that this kind of treatment, was nonetheless what many of us experienced, a fact that only adds to the confusion and pain in processing the polarity of horrors and manipulation that especially our sisters, but also our brothers, received.

At the time, there were whispers about a settled lawsuit, but the buffer of the Atlantic, and the informational insulation of a pre-internet era meant that no one knew any names or details of the litigation. Upon reading Premka's story in 2020 however, I realized those whispers were referring to the trauma she speaks of in her memoir.

Reading these horrific threads on social media, it has become apparent that there was a close-knit clique of individuals at the centre of the organization in New Mexico and L.A. who knew more about events than those of us who were more peripheral. I know that the vast majority of hard-working and devoted Kundalini Yoga teachers around the world are totally shocked and baffled by these revelations.

One of the trickier threads to untangle that Premka's book introduces is the question of the authenticity of Kundalini Yoga. The history of yoga spans multiple millennia and it would be impossible to count the number of yogis who have contributed to its many and divergent forms and practices. I am sure there are many yoga teachers in Punjab or anywhere else in India, who say they are teaching something similar to Kundalini Yoga without labeling it as such. So what? Who owns yoga? It has been [the official stance](#) of the Indian government for some time that yoga is an "invaluable gift of India's ancient tradition," and that asanas, etc., [should remain in the public domain](#), not to be

copyrighted.<sup>1</sup>

So my question is, can we trust our own hard-won experience? Or is it perhaps possible to hold both sides of this paradox: that Yogi Bhajan was a profoundly imperfect man who committed inexcusable acts to some people, while also creating and sharing a practice that has transformed countless lives for the better. Is it possible to continue - and even improve upon - this work because of the current conversation?

If Kundalini Yoga worked for us a year ago or a month ago, it will still work today, and next month, too.

My presence in this scene for 40 years is a testament to Kundalini Yoga being hugely effective for me personally. I was not practicing for Yogi Bhajan, or Guru Ram Das, or anyone else. My personal path of learning energetic healing has led me from Chinese medicine, to Awakened Dreaming, to Kabbalah and Shamanic practice, and always back to the therapeutic applications of Kundalini Yoga. When I travel to teach, I meet communities of dedicated practitioners and healers who have radiance, light, and grace around them, painstakingly garnered through their practice of Kundalini Yoga. And it is this reality which demonstrates the authenticity of Kundalini Yoga to me.

The one who delivered this technology and referred to himself as “a postman” has been found to be deeply flawed, so we each have to decide whether to throw the letters he delivered into the garbage, or to prize them as a unique and precious compendium of practical mystical wisdom.

In my view, this moment has brought into focus the absolute necessity of KRI and IKYTA as regulatory bodies with the ability to transparently develop and oversee the execution of guidelines and best practices for our community in a way that honors the progress and complexity of the times and the dignity and voices of all people as we work toward a new understanding of the work. Furthermore, in a world where information is immortalized online, we must be ready for public scrutiny, and for the real and legitimate demands for an objective and verifiable history of our practices, something that currently labors under some glaring inconsistencies.

My final observation is that the sacred feminine, Kundalini Shakti, is quite capable of looking after herself; should she continue to grace us with her presence and permission

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<sup>1</sup> It seems worth noting here that while we see a “™” at the end of the slogan of every teacher training advert, Yogi Bhajan never trademarked or copyrighted “Kundalini Yoga,” but rather his teaching methodology, unlike, say, another known abuser of his power and status as a spiritual teacher, Yogi Bikram, whose copyrighting of Bikram Yoga [enraged the worldwide yoga community](#).

to transmit the teachings we will remain both blessed and deeply grateful to serve the mission during the coming decades.

We have, for much of history, failed to look after the feminine. Women, girls, trans-femme individuals have not only had the strength to look after themselves, but to raise the next generations, initiate vital activism, and be the cornerstones of the cultures that oppress them with grace and dignity. Perhaps we might view this current moment as a surge of deep, raw feminine energy calling each of us to come to terms with our systemic and historic disenfranchisement of women in order that we may dismantle those systems.

I hope some of these words resonate as we begin to heal together. I welcome your thoughts, and especially invite the feedback of any women willing and able to share, whose lived experiences may help to illuminate some aspect of the conversation. This conversation is as necessary as it is painful as we pursue the Aquarian imperative of transition from belief to knowledge. It is especially important to treat each other and ourselves with compassion and dignity during these times and to lift up and protect the most vulnerable among us. My prayer is for Peace and Love in our community, and for all beings everywhere.

Sat Nam,

Guru Dharam