



Guruji: A Portrait of Sri K. Pattabhi Jois Through the Eyes of His Students

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An unprecedented portrait of a great yoga teacher and how teachings and traditions are transmitted and passed on

It is a rare and remarkable soul who becomes legendary during the course of his life by virtue of great service to others. Sri K. Pattabhi Jois was such a soul, and through his teaching of yoga, he transformed the lives of countless people. The school in Mysore that he founded and ran for more than sixty years trained students who, through the knowledge they received and their devotion, have helped to spread the daily practice of traditional Ashtanga yoga to tens of thousands around the world.

Guruji paints a unique portrait of a unique man, revealed through the accounts of his students. Among the thirty men and women interviewed here are Indian students from Jois's early teaching days, intrepid Americans and Europeans who traveled to Mysore to learn yoga in the 1970s, and important family members who studied as well as lived with Jois and continue to practice and teach abroad or run the Ashtanga Yoga Institute today. Many of the contributors (as well as the authors) are influential teachers who convey their experience of Jois every day to students in many different parts of the globe.

Anyone interested in the living tradition of yoga will find *Guruji* richly rewarding.

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Editorial Review

From the Inside Flap

"Guruji offers us an unprecedented portrait of a great yoga master.

Sri K. Pattabhi Jois (1915-2009) was a rare and remarkable soul who became legendary during the course of his life by virtue of great service to others. Known affectionately as Guruji, Jois founded and ran a yoga school in Mysore, India for more than sixty years. In Guruji, we follow his journey from a simple teacher of yoga in a Sanskrit college to a world-recognized authority and an inspiration to tens of thousands. We see how he trained students, many of whom have helped spread the daily practice of traditional Ashtanga yoga around the world, and we discover how Jois's method of vinyasa, which he learned from the great yogi Sri T. Krishnamacharya, has deeply influenced other forms of yoga widely practiced today. One of Jois's favorite expressions was, "Practice, practice and all is coming," and in Guruji we come to understand how the intensely physical and elaborate asana-based Ashtanga system he handed down is, in fact, a deeply spiritual discipline. And, although the commonly held idea about yogis is that they live solitary lives, Jois was a committed householder whose existence was as centered around family and home as on school and teaching. In Guruji, we learn by example about the challenges and rewards of integrating practice into lived lives.

The guru's transmission of energy and knowledge is a precept central to classical yoga. How Jois handed down teachings and values and what they were, the aspects of his personality and quality of his presence, and above all how he guided and changed so many lives through yoga--these are the subjects of Guruji. Through the words and recollections of students and close relations who knew Jois for over half a century, we are given remarkable insight into the life and mind of a dedicated yogi, an astonishing wealth of knowledge about the path of yoga, and a documentary account of how one traditional school of yoga has spread around the world. Among the thirty men and women interviewed here are Indian students from Jois's early teaching days; intrepid Americans and Europeans who traveled to Mysore to learn yoga in the 1970s; and important family members who studied as well as lived with Jois and continue to practice and teach abroad or run the Ashtanga Yoga Institute today. Many of the contributors (as well as the authors) have become influential teachers who convey their experience of Jois on a daily basis to students in many different parts of the globe. Anyone interested in the living tradition of yoga will find Guruji richly rewarding in its authenticity, in its indelible portrait of a great teacher, and in the depth of the wisdom it conveys."

--Inside Flap

About the Author

Guy Donahaye and **Eddie Stern** became students of Sri K. Pattabhi Jois in 1991. Donahaye is the director of the Ashtanga Yoga Shala NYC. Stern is the director of the Ashtanga Yoga New York and Sri Ganesh Temple, and is the copublisher and editor of *Namarupa*.

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Manju Jois

Manju Jois is Guruji's eldest child. He started practicing yoga with his father at the age of seven and began assisting him when he was thirteen. His demonstration in 1972 at the Ananda Ashram in Pondicherry was witnessed by David Williams and Norman Allen and fueled their desire to meet and study with Guruji, which led to the international spreading of ashtanga yoga. Manju travels and teaches all over the world and eventually settled in Southern California.

How old were you when you started to practice?

Oh, let's see, I was seven years old. It was just like a game for me, just to watch and then you try to do it because it's fun. It was not done seriously, he was not making me do things. We just went voluntarily and started playing with the postures, that's all.

When did Guruji start teaching you formally?

Formally when I was twelve years old. Then we had to practice every day—in the morning and evening. He started teaching me and my sister individually, giving us a private lesson. That's how it all started.

You started with private lessons?

Yes.

Then you joined his regular classes?

No, we were always private, never with any of the other students because he wanted to make us into good teachers, he wanted to make sure we were going to learn right.

He was training you to be a teacher?

Yes, absolutely.

When did you start learning to be a teacher?

I was just twelve or thirteen years old when I was starting to jump on people's backs and stuff like that. That's how I started. And he never stopped me from doing that and he was always guiding me what to do ... where to push, when to push. He started training me when I was very young. So that was really helpful for me because it was so natural, the way I learned it.

Was he teaching at the Sanskrit College?

Yes, at the Maharaja Sanskrit College. He was conducting the classes for the Sanskrit students and others to take. And that's where I used to do yoga, and that's where I used to help all these people who were coming there.

Was the school at the Jaganmohan Palace already closed at that time?

Yes.

Was Krishnamacharya around in those days?

I met Krishnamacharya when I was seven or eight years old. He came to Mysore to give a demonstration with his son, and that's the first time I met him.

Do you remember seeing your father practicing yoga?

Yes, yes.

Could you describe what it was like seeing your father practicing?

Well, for us it was fun to see my father doing yoga, putting himself in all these postures. It was really amazing. He used to pick a posture some-times and he would like to stay in that posture for a long time. That's how he used to practice. And that's how he started teaching us. There's no need to do millions of postures, just try to master one at a time. Then you can go to the next one. I really enjoyed watching my father doing yoga. Sometimes we all used to do it together, too: me and my sister and my father.

That's interesting. He teaches lots of postures to people, but to you he was advising the way he was practicing.

Well, yeah. He liked to master the thing, you see. So he was always telling us: "Master that, master that." Then you can go to the next one. But we are like little kids, we want to learn more, you know what I mean? "Oh, can I do this? If I can do this one, can I skip this one? Or can I go to that one?" Sometimes he let us do that, but at the same time he always had an eye on us to go back to finish that one. That's what he did.

So basically you started teaching with your dad when you were twelve or thirteen years old. How long did

that continue before you left India?

I left India in 1975. But before that, I traveled to a lot of places. I would take my friend and we would go to universities in different parts of India and give demonstrations and talks on yoga. It was very fun, actually. When did Guruji open the school in Lakshmipuram?

Mmm, that was about ... a long time ago, maybe '61, '62. I don't know.

He was teaching in both places at the same time?

Yeah, he was teaching at the Sanskrit College at the time. Then he was about to retire and wanted to have his own place. So he started to build that small yoga studio there.

How many students did Guruji have in that studio?

We had, like, fifty students.

What kind of reputation did Guruji have among his students?

They respected him a lot. We used to get people with sickness in the body like asthma and diabetes and all sorts of problems. And those are the ones who used to come to yoga because they tried everything and finally the doctors used to send these people to my father to do yoga. That's the kind of group we had, people with problems.

So doctors would send their patients to Guruji after they could not cure them?

In those days they did not have modern medicine. And the doctor would say, "Look, the best thing for you to do is yoga." Because we used get a lot of doctors, too, at the time. And they don't want to believe it, but they want to believe it—that is the kind of attitude they had.

Anyhow, when they started seeing the results with these people, who were getting healthier and healthier, then they would send patients to my father. "The best thing to do is just go to Pattabhi Jois, and do yoga, and then he would cure this." We got a lot of good results from doing that, yeah.

So he had a reputation for that.

Yeah, the Indian students who used to come, most of them were sick. All kinds of problems. That's why they started studying yoga. But we want to get a good yogic exercise. They used to come for the therapy. That's how it started.

Did Guruji adapt the practice at all for the therapy for the different students?

Yes, yes he did. He did mostly for the diabetic students. He'd make them sit in janu shirshasana A, B, C for a long time; baddha konasana, all the upavishtha konasanas work here mostly [points to abdomen], you know. So that's how he started.

How did he figure that out?

If you read the Hatha Yoga Pradipika it will explain which posture helps in what kind of disease. That's why you had to study not only yoga asanas, you got to study the books, too. It's like a medical book.

Can you describe a specific instance of a cure? Guruji once told me that he cured elephantiasis.

And leprosy. We did have a student who just started leprosy in his ears. At that time there was not medication for that. He came from Tamil Nadu. His father brought him because he was the only son he had. So my father started teaching yoga to this guy who was a leper. Then some of his students left because they didn't want to be there, because "Oh my God!" You know, they don't want to be in the same place.

They told my father, "If this guy is doing yoga here, we're not coming." And my father said, "Okay, that's fine. This is important for me."

So he started working with the guy. And then slowly the guy started to heal. His ears start getting better.

Then after that, he decided to go back to his hometown and start practicing every day.

If you can cure leprosy, you can cure anything. So then people started getting attracted to cure through yoga.

What do you think was your father's main interest in teaching yoga?

I think mostly he concentrated on healing. Healing is much more important for him. Once you start healing yourself, his philosophy is that yoga would take you automatically to the meditative state, you see.

If you are not well inside, you can't do anything—no meditation, no nothing. So that's how it will draw you into the spiritual path.

See, that's why he says the yoga asanas are important—you just do. Don't talk about the philosophy—99

percent practice and 1 percent philosophy, that's what he taught. You just keep doing it, keep doing it, then slowly it will start opening up inside of you, then you are able to see it. So that's why he likes to concentrate on that aspect—the healing process.

Does the student take responsibility for their healing process, or does Guruji make any kind of diagnosis of the student?

Ah, well, a lot of people will say, "Oh, Guruji has the answer for every-thing!" My father sees that, that's why he gives them work: "All right, do it! Do it! You'll find out." That's what he does: he diagnoses, but he doesn't say, "Okay, you have this problem ..." He figures out how to cure it.

I've noticed that he has a different attitude to different students. Do you think that's one of his techniques? I think so, yeah. He studies the students. He doesn't like impatient students. A lot of people go to my father and say, "Okay, I'll be here for two months." And they expect they are going to learn a lot of stuff in two months. And then, when my father says, "No, no, you've got to stay here more, you got to come here more often and continue this" and people get impatient, he cannot stand that. That's why he gets mean.

Because for him to learn this practice, he put in a lot of energy and time, and he's been punished by his guru. His guru did not teach him very easily, he tried to see how much patience he had to learn this.

He would say things like, "Come at eight o'clock or twelve o'clock to my home to do yoga." They had to be there exactly at twelve o'clock at his guru's place. If they were late, then he would make them stand in the sun for an hour and see, you know, what happens. So my father went through all those things. Then when he sees these impatient students, then he would say, "Hey!" [Laughter]

What is your impression about where the asanas come from? Did Krishnamacharya make it up? Did Rama Moha...

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