

**On Becoming a Yogi:  
the story of Marion (Mugs) McConnell and her  
teacher, Dr. Hari Dickman**

An unpublished prelude into

Letters from the Yoga Masters: Teachings Revealed through  
Correspondence from Paramhansa Yogananda, Ramana Maharshi, Swami  
Sivananda and Others, Published by North Atlantic Books ISBN 978-1-62317-035-6

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## A Karmic Journey Unfolding

What is it that leads one to yoga? Have you ever thought about this? The yoga masters claim that if you are drawn to yoga in this life, it is likely that the seeds of knowledge were planted in a past life. You did some work “before” and in the interim state between death and life you arranged the circumstances for continued learning to occur in this lifetime. The Isa Upanishad suggests a lovely prayer to help us remember what we have already learned.

*"May life go to immortal life, and the body go to ashes. OM. O my soul, remember past strivings, remember! O my soul, remember past strivings, remember!"<sup>1</sup>*

This sounds a bit like planning a trip or going to college. Before you go on a trip you study about the place you are going to, arrange accommodations, and if you know people in the area you plan how to spend time with them. If you are going to college you arrange what courses to take. Then you go.

Is it so far-fetched to think the same happens between our lifetimes? We assess what we want to learn during this lifetime, arrange where to live and who to live with, who we hope to encounter in order to enhance our learning, and then we go. We humans have great planning skills, so why wouldn't we use them and arrange things so we can get the most out of this lifetime? It makes total sense to me.

If I take a look at my life so far, I can see exactly how this has unfolded. I was born Marion Knezacek in 1955 in Creston, a small town in the Kootenay region of British Columbia. We were a family of six children of a devoted mom and dad. My mom was less than five feet tall and my dad was about five feet six inches. I was the youngest, the smallest, and apparently a brat.

For as far back as I can remember I wanted to practice ballet. I wanted to move my body and explore where it could move. I begged my mother to let me take ballet

lessons, but the teacher would not let anyone in class until they were five years old. I pleaded and begged for what seemed an eternity, until finally the teacher let me in when I was four. Whew! I was on cloud nine.

I took ballet lessons for 10 years and danced continuously in the living room, in the yard, and on stage, performing for anyone and no one. My parents bought me music to dance to and accommodated my limited talent beyond reason. I am surprised I never put my foot through the new RCA black and white television as I leapt through confined spaces.

When I turned 14 we moved away from British Columbia to a small town in northern Manitoba. There were no ballet lessons available but the high school was trying to pull together a gymnastics team. I joined and worked hard, practicing gymnastics regularly. I loved discovering these new places I could take my body. My skill level advanced quickly so the coaches sent me to the regional competitions. It was there I discovered I completely fell apart when I was competing. If I practiced for myself I was fluid and at peace. When I performed to win I no longer enjoyed what I was doing. In fact, I didn't even know why I was doing it when I was competing. I just wanted to do it for the pure joy of doing it, but that wasn't exactly being a so-called "team player."

Two years later, in 1971, we moved back to British Columbia to the town of Penticton. By this time I was 16 and the only child left at home. My hormones had kicked in full force. I wasn't interested in ballet and I was done with gymnastic teams. My new desire was to learn how to meditate.

Where did that come from? From leaping and flying through the air to complete stillness? I am certain it came from the deep inner peace I found when I danced or contorted my body into many fluid shapes and forms. So my quest began to find someone to teach me how to meditate.

I read the book *Be Here Now* by Ram Das and searched for someone to guide me into the spaces of the mind. After a year we moved from an apartment to a house and

I soon met the lady next door, Mrs. Edith Thorslund. Surprisingly, she just happened to be a meditator. She was trained in Transcendental Meditation, but told me she was not allowed to teach me how to do it. I had to wait until a teacher came to town and then I could ask them for a mantra initiation. In the meantime, she could introduce me to yoga and I should come over on Saturday.

I was a little disappointed with her offer as this was not the goal I had in mind. I had no idea what this yoga was, but decided I may as well look into it in case it might be a suitable substitution until I could learn how to meditate. When I arrived at her door on the following Saturday morning, she turned on the television and we watched Kareen Zebroff run through a class of the basic asanas. My excitement was palpable. This was the movement of my body I was looking for. Peaceful and strong. Non-competitive. Delicious! I immediately went downtown and bought Kareen's book *The ABC of Yoga*<sup>2</sup> and started a daily practice. I was 17 years old.

It wasn't until I was nearly 19 that I was able to learn how to meditate, but the yoga asana practice appealed me and allowed me to be patient. I had developed a serious practice of an hour of yoga twice a day. I was attending the University of British Columbia and went to see a presentation on Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's system of Transcendental Meditation. It inspired me to go to his Transcendental Meditation centre in downtown Vancouver and receive a mantra.

Now my yoga practice consisted of two daily meditations and two daily asana practices. I enjoyed it very deeply. Occasionally I found a yoga class I could attend, which began to expand my practice. The more I learned, the more I needed to know. The desire was so deep, so great within me, that I wanted more than anything to be a teacher of yoga and not the social worker I was training to be.

During my time at university my body began to suffer from the hours of sitting in classes, lectures, and libraries while writing papers. I developed severe sciatica, and although I was very flexible and doing a steady practice of yoga, the pain persisted. I had constant pain, even during sleep. I could no longer sit during classes so I stood

against the wall. I typed my assignments on my knees. Fun activities like sitting through a movie or dinner only aggravated and deepened my discomfort. No chiropractor or physiotherapist was able to ease the constant nagging pain. Eventually I was given a myelogram, where dye was injected into the fluid-filled space around my spinal cord and then observed by x-ray. It indicated there was no damage to my spine or the discs. The conclusion was my pain was caused by incorrect posture. A doctor recommended I take a break from university and try something different for a while to see if it would give me relief.

This was the permission I needed to make a change. The studies were not leading me where my heart wanted to go anyway. I made a decision to use my remaining finances for travel. As soon as I was able to set my affairs in order I booked a flight to Australia.

Why Australia? Why not India? I had no idea at the time but it soon became apparent to me. During my travels there I encountered a yoga teacher, Mrs. Val Diakos, from the International Yoga Teachers Association. She generously offered to take me around on a sightseeing drive and during our discussions I learned that the IYTA had a yoga teacher training program. I couldn't believe it. I could become a yoga teacher after all—there was a place for me to study. The next objective in my life had just unfolded.

My investigations into the training led me to the realization that doing the yoga teacher training in Australia was not feasible. The trainings occurred over one weekend a month for the duration of a year and I didn't have the means to stay there that long. Since the IYTA was an international association, I decided to check into the training in another country and see if different formats were offered.

I wrote to Mrs. Velta Snikere-Wilson, who at the time was the IYTA representative for Great Britain. She informed me that their training was held in the same format as that of the IYTA and suggested I contact a renowned yogi in California who may be willing to teach me. He was her first teacher, a Dr. Hari Dikmanis.

California seemed feasible. By now it was July 1977 and I was 21 years old. I had been practicing yoga constantly for over four years and meditating for nearly two. I needed direction. I felt inspired, but wanted guidance. I did not know where to take my yoga practice, although a deep yearning for more kept burning inside me. I had no idea of the possibilities that lay before me; I just knew I needed to go “there,” wherever “there” was. I immediately wrote to Dr. Dikmanis.

He replied promptly. At the age of 82, he had only a small group of students. He rented a room in the home of Katherine and Jinendra Jain and did not have a place to teach regular classes, so he held one class a week for specific students who wanted to study the deeper aspects of yoga. Hari expressed genuine concern for the expenses related to me staying in California to study with him. He didn't know many people there, so he couldn't help me find a place to live. He explained he was never very good at resolving these practical issues and it would be much easier if I stayed in an ashram where housing and food were included. He was careful not to fully deny my request to learn from him, mainly because Mrs. Snikere-Wilson had recommended him to me, so he offered that, for a time, we maintain regular correspondence by letters. He would do his best to answer all of my questions and give me guidance to sources where I could learn the deeper aspects of various yoga practices.

I was truly disappointed that the notion of packing my bags and parking myself on Hari's doorstep was not feasible. But the idea of corresponding with this amazing man at least appeased me for a while. His letters clearly indicated that his wisdom was way over my head, and my four years of yoga with Zebroff's book, and the occasional yoga class, were merely baby steps in a vast sea of knowledge completely unknown to me. And so the letters began.

During our correspondence it became apparent that Hari loved chocolate. A pattern developed that I would send Hari chocolate in return for his guidance. There was a delicatessen in town where I would buy Swiss Suchard chocolate—he preferred the milk chocolate—and mail it to him as needed. He always insisted on sending me \$5 notes in return. If I didn't send chocolate, he would write me a letter and enclose

money, asking if he could please bother me to send more soon. If I sent chocolate without a letter, then he expressed his disappointment that no yogic questions had arrived. Later I learned that he continuously sent money through the mail to yoga masters for books or pamphlets, or just to donate to the cause.

In his first letters to me Hari recommended I buy some classical yoga books on the topics of pranayama and hatha yoga teachings, as well as books by Paramhansa Yogananda. By the third letter he suggested I pursue the path of hatha yoga and arrange to study with either Swami Vishnudevananda or Swami Shivalingam. Both were living in Canada and both were disciples of Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh, whom Hari had a longstanding relationship with and spoke very highly of.

Hari knew Swami Vishnudevananda personally, assuring me he was a highly skilled master of hatha yoga, so skilled he could sometimes be a little impatient with his students. Bearing this in mind, I immediately enrolled myself in both the Introductory and Advanced Yoga Teacher Training courses, which were to be held in the Bahamas about five months later. Hari was delighted and invited me to stop and visit him on my way to or from the training. I was so excited I could barely stand the wait.

It is understood amongst the yogis that “Where the mind goes, prana follows.” Wherever we focus our attention, our energy will be directed toward that goal. As I reflect on all of the events that occurred in perfect sequence, it becomes so obvious to me that it was inevitable that I would become a yoga teacher. The burning desire to move with my body, along with the desire to meditate, led me to meet certain people who guided me to my teachers.

Rarely do we clearly perceive what the true result of a desire will look like, but it becomes clearer as the events unfold. Somewhere deeply planted within my being was the seed of desire to become a yogini. Even without knowing what a yogini was the seed was there within me, and as my life unfolded the pathway opened up for me to follow. Was this coincidence, or wisdom from a past life setting the stage for this one?



## At the Ashram

On the way to the Sivananda Ashram in the Bahamas I stopped in San Rafael to meet Hari. When we met we loved each other immediately, deep in our hearts. I cannot really describe it other than pure joy; meeting this humble man—the pure joy or bliss described as *ananda* by the yoga masters—was far beyond that received from simple pleasures.

During our short visit together Hari shared with me some basic pranayama techniques, meditations, and other introductions to varying aspects of yoga that were all so new and foreign to me. These became an extremely beneficial foundation as I approached an intense two-month *sadhana* (spiritual practice) in the ashram.

During one meditation Hari asked me to notice my breath—to watch how it would slow down significantly as my mind slowed down, and visa versa. If I wanted to slow down the mind, then I should slow down the breath. As a novice I found this to be a most amazing tidbit of information. When I returned to my meditation I was much more aware of the natural pace of my breathing.

Hari called me to the surface again during this meditation. He suggested I place my hand along his spine and tell him what I could feel. I felt an intense heat right up to his heart *chakra*. He had raised the *kundalini* energy up to that spot during his meditation. He told me it was quite difficult to move beyond the heart chakra, and suggested I should practice my ability to concentrate and focus my mind in order to achieve this.

I left Hari feeling a deep sadness and a great excitement for that which awaited me. I felt a little more prepared for what I was about to embark upon, although nothing could quite prepare me for the world that was about to open up to me.

When I finally arrived at the ashram I pitched my pup tent under a kumquat tree and checked out my surroundings. It was warm and humid. The ashram expanded



across a narrow part of Paradise Island and there was ocean on both sides. When it was windy or too sunny on one side, it was calm and cool on the other. There was a garden for growing vegetables and an open-air dining area for us to eat. The temple was painted with brilliantly colored gods and goddesses surrounded by tropical forest.

When I sat down in the temple I was overwhelmed with emotion, a feeling that I had finally come home. I cried tears of joy. On the altar I saw Jesus, Krishna, Buddha, and several other statues and photos of gods and people I did not know. Other pathways to God were accepted here, not just the Hindu path. It felt so right. As a child I was raised attending the United Church, which was fairly liberal-minded, even back then—but it was made very clear that the only way to heaven was through Jesus. This troubled me, as I could not comprehend a God that would exclude anyone. It just didn't add up. Here everyone was included. Everyone and every path to God were welcome.

This truth was lived out in the activities I experienced. On one special occasion Swami Vishnudevananda invited a Baha'i priest to the ashram to lead us through their form of worship. At Easter an Anglican priest was invited to lead the celebration. Swami Sivananda preached "The Paths are Many, and the Truth is One," and here we learned to live it. This touched me deeply in my heart, forever.

While Swami Vishnudevananda lovingly shared the truths of yoga abundantly with us, I was a bit intimidated by him. Occasionally I heard him voicing his "parental" impatience at students when he didn't think they were really focused on the task at hand. I vowed that I would remain incognito and go unnoticed. During lectures and meditation I purposely found a seat in the back of the temple, hoping Swami Vishnu wouldn't notice me (we often referred to Swami Vishnudevananda as Swami Vishnu).

One day, during my second month in the ashram, I thought it would be a good idea to lean my back against a pillar in the temple during the long afternoon lecture. This caused me to sit a little closer to Swami Vishnu. While he lectured I was

studiously writing notes and he mistook my head facing downward as me sleeping. “Bhanumati!” he yelled. “You are sleeping! Pay attention!”

Surprised by his accusation, I retorted quickly. “No Swamiji (adding “ji” to the end of a name or title is a sign of respect), I am not sleeping - I am writing notes!” All the other students knew I was very dedicated to learning *yoga vidya* (knowledge) so they nodded and murmured their agreement with me. But Swami Vishnu saw it differently. “Don’t you argue with me! You were sleeping!” I learned quickly that you couldn’t win an argument with Swami Vishnu, so I just sat farther back in the class.



Swami Vishnudevananda giving a lecture in the temple for teacher training. 1978. Author photo.



Author taking notes during teacher training, 1978. Photographer unknown.

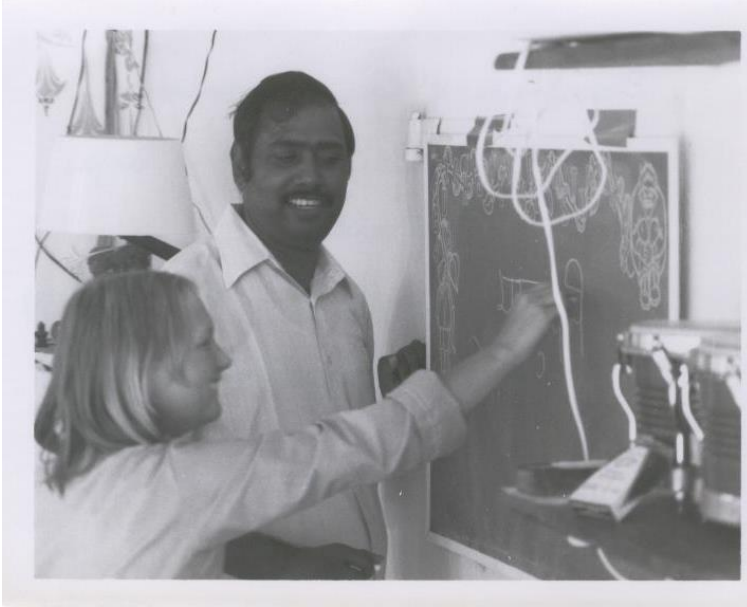
Even though Swami Vishnu was impatient with me, I savoured every minute with him. I doodled on my notebooks expressing my love and devotion for all the knowledge he was imparting to me. I was filled with gratitude every day. Some early mornings I would wake up to the gong of the bell and wonder why on earth I was putting myself through all of this, but I would always get up and make my way to the temple for the start of another day.

Our daily schedule during the training was fairly rigorous. For the first month we rose at 5:30 a.m. to be at the temple for morning meditation and *satsang* by six o'clock. By 8 a.m. we were on the tennis court with our blankets for morning *asanas* and *pranayama*. At 10 a.m. we received brunch and then headed out to do our required *karma yoga*.

Karma yoga included washing pots and pans, cooking meals, making bread, weeding the garden, squeezing fresh carrots through the juicer, and selling snacks in the kiosk. Everyone had a task assigned for an entire month. Some students did their karma yoga at odd hours, such as baking bread in the early morning or washing dishes after the evening meal, but for most of us karma yoga ended by noon and we would all return to the temple to study the *Yoga Sutras*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and Vedanta philosophy. The main lecture with Swami Vishnu began at 2 p.m. and by 4 p.m. we returned to the tennis court for another session of asanas. Dinner was served at 6 p.m. and we were back in the temple by 8 p.m. for meditation, satsang, and what seemed like unending evening lectures from Swami Vishnu. Some nights he would talk until 11:30 p.m., doing his best to ensure we understood all the yogic truths he was trying to ingrain in us.

In between karma yoga, asanas, and lectures we lined up at the concrete saltwater showers. There was no need to worry about running out of hot water since there was none to be had. The cold saltwater didn't lather shampoo very well, but with no other choice I was content to get in the shower every day.

During my second month in the ashram we rose at 4:30 a.m. so we would be ready for *kriyas* and pranayama at 5 a.m. We learned how to write Sanskrit from Gauri Shankar, a lawyer from India whom I liked very much. We studied the deeper concepts of the yoga philosophies, including *panchikarana* and the *koshas*. Swami Vishnu taught us anatomy and physiology in the afternoons and we deepened our practice of the more advanced asanas.



Author with Gauri Shankar during the Sanskrit lessons, ca. 1978. Photographer unknown.



Swami Vishnudevananda teaching anatomy and physiology, ca. 1978. Author photo.

One day it became apparent to me that my sciatic pain was no longer bothering me. In spite of the hours of lectures sitting crossed legged on the temple floor, I realized the pain was gone and I wasn't even really sure when it left. How? I was sitting way more hours than I ever did during my time at university and I was sitting on a hard floor. The only time we ever sat on a bench was during meals. I was sleeping on the ground in my tent without a mattress. Comforts were few, but my pain was gone. The healing occurred due to the yoga.

For five years previous to this training I was practicing yoga asanas twice a day, but I had never understood the concept of a balanced yoga class. All I ever practiced was my favourite asanas, never thinking that an order or sequence to these poses was important to consider. At the ashram there was a definite sequence to the poses that we practiced twice daily and it didn't take long for this to have a healing affect. Each asana session included forward bends, back bends, side bends, twisting postures, inverted postures and balancing postures. The benefit of these ensured stimulation and balance throughout the bodily systems, from the muscular and skeletal systems to the endocrine and nervous systems.



Swami Vishnudevananda teaching asana, ca. 1978. Author photo.

The teachings of Swami Sivananda (1887-1963) were being passed down to me through his disciple (and my guru), Swami Vishnudevananda. The asanas included the classical Rishikesh sequence, which all Swami Sivananda's disciples used as the basis for their own yoga systems when they were sent out to the West. Swami Sivananda was an Ayurvedic doctor and was dedicated to the healing of many ill people from all walks of life. His Rishikesh sequence ensured that all the bodily systems were tended to equally in a simple sequence of poses.

Here, under Swami Vishnudevananda's tutelage, I practiced twice daily the orderly sequence of poses that warmed up, strengthened, and lengthened my muscles. The practice massaged my internal vital organs and stimulated my endocrine glands. My nervous system was awakened, my hips were opened, my posture was improved, and I was free from pain. In addition to that, my yoga asanas had become more advanced than I ever thought they could be. I felt amazing!

While I studied in the ashram I was given the spiritual name "Bhanumati." Swami Vishnu said it means "The Light that shines on everything." From then on Hari addressed me as Bhanumati while we continued to write letters to each other. I would write him about the things I was learning and he would ask me questions causing me to delve deeper into what Swami Vishnu was teaching me. Swami Vishnu would send messages to Hari through me, and Hari likewise sent messages through me to Swami Vishnu. They were enjoying reconnecting with each other. All the while my mother and sister continued the task of sending Hari chocolate.

Upon completing my training in the ashram I didn't feel ready to teach or return to the everyday world. I decided to do karma yoga work in Swami Vishnudevananda's Yoga Centers. First he sent me to the San Francisco Sivananda Yoga Center and later to the Hollywood Sivananda Yoga Center. Both of these places were close to San Rafael so I would occasionally phone Hari. I did not have transportation other than the bus so I could not visit often, but each visit and phone call was very special. My knowledge of yoga had expanded dramatically over the past months, so we now conversed on a

much deeper level using completely different terminology. Our friendship intensified as a result.

One day when I phoned Hari a woman at the house answered the phone but she did not summon Hari to take my call, so I told her I would call some other time. Hari wrote me shortly after that he was very upset he missed my call. Apparently he was right there in the room. He had told the woman that whenever I call she must wake him up and that I should ensure this to be the case thereafter. Our phone calls were as important to him as they were to me.

*I am so sorry I could not hear your voice and personally hear your problems, as well to hear about your advanced studies with Swami Vishnudevanandaji...if you, dear Marion, give a telephone call please insist that they (whoever it may be) call me at the telephone i.e. that you want personally [to] talk with me.<sup>3</sup>*

In the summer of 1978 it was time for me to return to Canada. I was being sent to do karma yoga in the Montreal Sivananda Yoga Centre, and after that—I didn't know. I stopped in to see Hari on the way home. Katherine Jain, the owner of the house where Hari lived, picked me up at the bus depot and she informed me that Hari had requested her permission to invite me to study with him on a live-in basis. She and her husband were going to India that fall for an extended period of time. I could come and stay there during their absence. Hari and I were ecstatic! I could return after fulfilling my commitments in Montreal, and both of us could hardly wait.

There is an old saying from the yoga masters that when the student is ready, the teacher appears. All this time I had wanted to study with Hari, but I was not ready. I had no foundation, no terminology or basis of knowledge in yoga. How could Hari teach me? This was why he sent me to Swami Vishnudevananda—to get the basics so he could impart upon me the deeper teachings. The guru can only give to the student what she is able to receive, and if the student cannot even speak the language, then that must be learned first. Swami Vishnudevananda laid a wonderful foundation for me to receive teachings from Hari. For this I am eternally grateful.



Swami Vishnudevananda  
lecturing on Panchikarana.  
Author photos.



Author doing asana. Left: vrischikasana (scorpion pose); right: hanumanasana (front facing splits).  
Photographer unknown.





## My Time with Hari

I arrived at Hari's home in San Rafael, California sometime in the first week of January 1979. It was pre-arranged for me to sleep in Katherine and Jinendra Jain's room while they were away in India and then sleep on the laundry room floor when they returned. I could use Jinendra's desk in the laundry room for my work. I was to pay \$25 per week rent and help with the household chores. Other people rented rooms in the house as well and everyone pitched in.

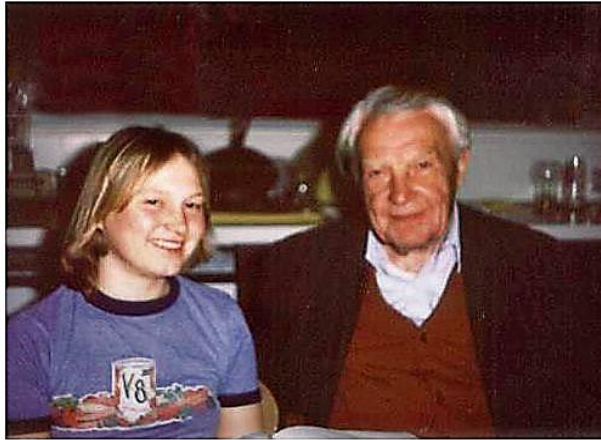
Katherine wrote to me explaining that I must pay Hari and that I must not tire him.

*PS. If you do choose to stay here please be careful not to tire Dr. He will go on too long for his own good so you must be super considerate. Perhaps you can make up a rule for yourself that you will have 1 or 2 long classes per day and not continue after 9pm. You should also consider what you can pay him. He will not bring it up but you must honor the true yogic tradition of helping the teacher financially and otherwise. And he will not think well of you if this demonstration of respect and concrete appreciation is lacking.<sup>4</sup>*

In a following letter Katherine clarified what I should pay Hari.

*Dr. D gives a class to a small group each week and charges \$4. It lasts about 3 hours. You would join that class and have a private class four additional days for a fee of \$20 per week. This should be paid at the beginning of the week to Dr. D. I certainly congratulate you on your ability to take advantage of being with this rare teacher and beautiful soul.<sup>5</sup>*

Without Katherine's generosity this opportunity would never have been possible. She must have known how important this was to Hari as she went out of her way and made sure it all came together for us.



Author and Dr. Dickman studying in San Rafael, 1979. Photo: Mark Hovila.

So there I was, an immature 23-year-old, plunked into the arms of an 84-year-old yogi sage. I had no comprehension of how fortunate I was to be invited to study with him. We had been writing letters back and forth for almost two years, and finally we were studying yoga face to face.

Hari was not an early riser. Perhaps he spent his mornings in meditation. He would come out of his room around 11 or 11:30 a.m. I would make him a cup of warm water with a tablespoon of lemon juice. Then he would eat a light breakfast and we would begin our studies.

Each day he would come out with a specific letter from a yoga master and we would read through it together, highlighting the important points for me to grasp. I asked many questions for further clarification and made copious notes on the topic of the day. Some of the concepts were way over my head, but Hari was always patient. He also helped me understand many questions that arose during my studies in the ashram with Swami Vishnudevananda.

We studied *kriyas* including various ways to do *neti* (nasal cleansing). I had learned *sutra neti* using a catheter at the ashram, and *jal neti* using water and a neti pot while living at the Sivananda Centre in Hollywood. Hari showed me how to do *sit krama* by putting the water in his mouth and then pushing it upwards and out through

his nostrils. It reminded me of mistakenly swallowing water while swimming in the ocean and I wasn't very good at it.

On Mondays two other students would come in and we shared asana classes together. Hari would tease me not to do any asana in front of them or I may scare them off. He was thrilled that I was adept at so many asanas, but he had some excellent advice and corrections for me too, plus he reminded me that they were not the most important aspect of yoga.

During the time I knew Hari he wasn't much interested in teaching a lot of *Hatha Yoga*. He had long ago shifted his focus to other yoga pathways such as *Natha Yoga*, *Laya Yoga*, and *Kriya Yoga*, but by this time his focus was *Raja Yoga*. Hari said, "Hatha Yoga leads us to Raja Yoga." This was a great teaching for me. I loved the hatha practice, but over the years it began to take a back seat to the meditation practice. His guidance helped me to not feel guilty when I wasn't doing asana every day, but to appreciate the fact that I was drawn from the outer limbs toward the inner limbs of yoga.

We westerners place so much importance on asana. As a teacher I was asked by students regularly, "How often do you do yoga?"—meaning how often am I on my mat doing asana. The truth is, I do yoga pretty much all day every day; I practice all the aspects of yoga, from truthfulness to asana to meditation and chanting, to recognizing those delicious moments of *samadhi*.

Hari felt *pranayama* was much more important than asanas and he carefully explained many of the finer points of its practice. It was wonderful that at the ashram I had established a routine of *anuloma viloma* to cleanse the nadis and was prepared for these details. In our daily practice Hari was explicit on how to achieve the greatest intake of oxygen according to Swami Kavalayananda's research published in *Yoga Mimamsa Journal*.

We regularly meditated together. When I first learned Transcendental Meditation I did two sessions a day, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Each session

was to be twenty minutes. Hari agreed that regular sessions were important, but he also taught me that every moment we could take to meditate counted, all day every day. He carried a little notebook in his shirt pocket, and whenever he had five minutes here or ten minutes there, he would meditate. He recorded each and every minute throughout the day that he meditated and at the end of each day he would add them up. These short meditations, plus his dedicated longer sessions would add up to quite a nice total of peace.

Once I learned of this from Hari I never hesitated to dip into the bliss of meditation. It changed my reactions to circumstances in my world and I found that more often than not I could respond with more clarity and kindness.

I learned different ways to meditate, including the “Who am I?” meditation from Ramana Maharshi. I didn’t really understand this meditation very clearly then, but with regular practice it changed for me. It has become one of my favourite methods, as it was for Hari. (This meditation will be explained later in this book under the *Atma Vichara* meditation.)

As I mentioned earlier, along with my inquiring letters I mailed Hari Swiss Suchard Milka chocolate on a regular basis. Chocolate played a big role in our relationship, and it was not just for pleasure; it was also part of a spiritual ritual, as odd as that may seem. Each philosophy discussion was accompanied with a bowl of chocolate m&m’s. Hari was quite particular about not eating the brown m&m’s and delighted that I would eat them so he could eat the coloured ones. He often commented how pleased he was to have someone to share his love of chocolate with, especially someone who would take care of getting rid of “the brown ones”.

In one letter to me Hari related chocolate to the Who am I meditation.

*I should at once utilize this moment, when a desire arises, and ask: ‘Who is it who wants a chocolate? Is it the body, Is it the Prana, Is it the mind, Is it the intellect, or is it the Self (Atma, Purusha)?’*

This kind of vichara [inquiry] if seriously pursued can be of some temporary help, for it shows that the desire is not in Me, but in the pranamaya kosha, manomaya kosha, but not in Me/Atma)<sup>6</sup>

I asked Hari one day, "Do you think when you die you will be enlightened and not have to come back again?" He replied without hesitation, "Oh no, I like chocolate too much."

Sometimes he justified his love of chocolate.

Actually the milk chocolates, besides being an object of enjoyment, supply me with some necessary ingredients, which are lacking in my rather otherwise, poor and monotonous diet. Eg. I do not use any dairy products, so under the guise of chocolate I get some milk which otherwise I dislike and avoid. Also the chocolates contain lecithin, which is necessary for a brain worker. Though a yogi has in the beginning of his yogic training [to] observe some dietary rules, the only rule later on is, that one should observe moderation in eating, but may eat what one likes (Vivekananda, Raja Yoga).<sup>7</sup>

where the sadhanas are without clarifying the needed details. You should not bother too much about 'Milk'. Though I am very happy when I get them, if I don't get them it is also good for me. It makes me remember that I am not the one who asks for it. Naturally, if I would have more time at my disposal, which I unfortunately do not have, I should at once utilise this moment, when a desire arises, and ask: "Who is it who wants a chocolate? Is the answer is 'I', then the query is pursued further: "Who is this 'I'? Is it the body, Is it the Prana, Is it the mind, Is it the intellect? Or is it the Self (Atma; Purusha)?"

This kind of Vichara if seriously pursued can be of some temporary help, for it shows that the desire is not in Me, but in the pranamaya kosha, & manomaya kosha, but not in the (Atma). But more effective is Krिया yoga, for it is Prana-vriya and the seat of desire is in Pranamaya kosha (and Manomaya kosha too). But a practitioner really do now is to draw in the senses (pratyakha) and concentrate or remember, that I am above the mind.

A question may arise: why then, I still enjoy the Milk and do not always practise the Pratyakha, which I have much practised and with success in my life? I confess it is difficult to answer, and if answered it will not be easy to understand by most people, may be you, who Bhaktiyoga might understand. It is the same as some great yogis used occasionally to smoke or to drink alcohol too. Sri Sri Ramakrishna said it is to keep to the earth. Otherwise, there is no desire and the jiva finding no joy in this life, flies away. Now I have two desires (one, I forgot) interesting book on Yoga and I, as you know 'Suchard Milk'. I have lost my house, garden and my country (the Russian communist robbed it) my brother and my wife have passed away, so what remains or to put it in other words what is the use of my living on this earth anyway? It would have a sense if I could share my knowledge and experiences in yoga to people eager to know, but... such are few. Strangely enough those who are wealthy get more students, like for example, how and how to pass

Letter to author from  
Dr. Hari Dickman, July  
11, 1978.

The sweetest justification that warmed my heart was this:

*A question may arise why then, I still enjoy the Milka and do not always practice Pratyahara [withdrawal from the senses], which I have much practiced and with success in my life? I confess it is difficult to answer, and if answered it will not be easy to understand by most people, maybe you, dear Bhanumati, might understand? It is the same as some great Yogis used occasionally to smoke or to drink alcohol too. Sri Sri Ramakrishna said it is to keep to the earth. Otherwise, there is no desire and the Jiva finding no joy in this life, flies away. Now I have two desires, viz. 1) a good, interesting book on Yoga and 2) as you know, "Suchard Milka."*

*I have lost my house, garden and my country (the Russian communist[s] robbed it) my brothers and my wife have passed away, so what remains, or to put it in other words what is the use of my living on this earth anyway? It would have a sense if I could share my knowledge and experiences in Yoga to people eager to know, but..."such are few."<sup>8</sup>*

In another letter he continued his justification for eating chocolate.

*When I write a letter, especially a spiritual one, and also when I get some books on Yoga, or some letter from a Yogi, I like to eat Milka, for these mentioned things make me feel happy and I make something like a festival but as I don't drink, nor use drugs, so my substitute is Suchard Milka. Of course, you dear Marion, need not follow in my footsteps.<sup>9</sup>*

Speaking of diet, Hari liked pork chops. This surprised me, since he was such a dedicated yogi and Swami Vishnu would never allow us to eat any meat at all. For whatever reason, Hari enjoyed eating meat and it was something he didn't want to give up. He justified it by telling me that in Swami Sivananda's book, *Kundalini Yoga*, onions and garlic are considered worse than meat.<sup>10</sup> In some cases of serious illness

garlic is used as a remedy, but never used as a food. Swami Vishnu taught us that onions and garlic had a negative effect on our meditations and would stir our animal passions. Hari did not eat garlic and onions, but he did eat a little meat. I willingly and most lovingly cooked pork chops for Hari's dinners.

We would often sit and talk in Hari's room, which was small, with a single bed, a desk and chair, and two bookshelves lined with yoga books sent to him from yoga masters. These little talk sessions were special times for both of us. We would talk about his wife, Latvia, Paramhansa Yogananda, Canada, or my passion for travel. He really didn't like to travel, and I was planning a backpacking trip of 2,500 miles with my sister along the Pacific Crest Trail. He just couldn't imagine my doing that and considered me to be very brave.

Our days were full of laughter and love, sharing endless conversations in English and Sanskrit, meditating and breathing together. I couldn't get enough of it and he had more to give than I could ever absorb. His few Monday yoga students said that since I had arrived the colour had come back into his cheeks and he was happy.

The teachings that Hari imparted upon me then have been deepening in their meaning over the years and I realize they are passed down from many of the great yoga masters we only hear about today. This incredible unfolding in my life humbles me. As the copies of my letters fade I am driven to share at least some of this direct and personal wisdom with others so it continues to be passed on. This has been accomplished through the book I wrote to honour Hari, *Letters from the Yoga Masters: Teachings Revealed through Correspondence from Paramhansa Yogananda, Ramana Maharshi, Swami Sivananda and Others.*



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- <sup>1</sup> *The Upanishads*, Commentary by Juan Mascaro, London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1965, p. 50.
- <sup>2</sup> Kareen Zebroff, *The ABC of YOGA*, Agassiz: Forbez Enterprises Ltd, 1971.
- <sup>3</sup> Dr. Hari Dickman, San Rafael, CA. *Letter to Marion Knezacek*, San Rafael, CA June 27, 1978.
- <sup>4</sup> Katherine da Silva Jain, San Rafael, CA. *Letter to Marion Knezacek*, November 4, 1978.
- <sup>5</sup> Katherine da Silva Jain, San Rafael, CA. *Letter to Marion Knezacek*, November 17, 1978.
- <sup>6</sup> Dr. Hari Dickman, San Rafael, CA. *Letter to Marion Knezacek*, September 16, 1978.
- <sup>7</sup> Dr. Hari Dickman, San Rafael, CA. *Letter to Marion Knezacek*, July 11, 1978.
- <sup>8</sup> Dr. Hari Dickman, San Rafael, CA. *Letter to Marion Knezacek*, September 16, 1978.
- <sup>9</sup> Dr. Hari Dickman, San Rafael, CA. *Letter to Marion Knezacek*, October 1, 1978.
- <sup>10</sup> Sri Swami Sivananda, Rishikesh, *Kundalini Yoga*, Divine Life Trust Society, 10th Edition, 1994, p.10.