

## The Elements of a Good Teacher

By Donalee Campbell

In the DVD series, *The Basics of Anusara Teacher Training*, John Friend discusses *adhikara* or studentship, and how it relates to each of the elements. *Adhikara* is assuming the seat of the disciple or bringing in the qualities that make us good students. In his view, bringing those same qualities to bear also makes the best teachers. His discussion inspired me to reflect on how I could relate this fresh perspective to the ethics of classical yoga, and apply these ideas to many of the issues that yoga teachers and teacher training students are currently facing.

We must begin with the overarching element of space, or ether, in bringing openness, humility, and a beginner's mind to each new situation. *Ishvarapranidhana*, or surrender to the Divine, is one of the *niyamas* outlined in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*. It reminds us that the guru comes in many forms and to be humble enough to heed the call. The guru principle—that when the student is ready, the teacher will appear—shows us that each person and situation can present an opportunity to learn the lessons we are next ready to receive. Good teachers are perpetual students. As part of an evolving universe, we can never stop learning, lest we stagnate and start to decay. Our growth will be limited unless we are open to receiving in an unconditional manner. When we are resistant to certain teachers because of their background, methods, mannerisms, or even because the subject matter of their teaching was repeated material or not what we expected, we miss out on the lessons they have to teach us. If we think we know it all already, wisdom has no place to expand. If we think hatha yoga is all about *asana*, we miss the intention that brought it into form. The philosophy brings meaning and permeates the practice on every level. It cannot be forgotten. Often we have aversion to that which is difficult for us to see or to learn. If we encompass a perspective that's larger than our point of view, difficult situations offer the most fertile ground for growth. May we strive to be unbounded, encompassing all unconditionally, in a space of limitless expansion and growth.

The earth provides a strong foundation that is both a centre upon which to focus our energies and steady ground to rest upon. From the earth we can learn patience, discipline, steadiness and regularity. There is no benefit to rushing through the process. It takes time to assimilate and integrate true learning. The earth is strong, unwavering and committed. Unceasingly, she dedicates her time and energy towards growth. If we think the details of *asana* are not important, we are missing the roots that allow us to grow tall. Continued growth demands relentless work on a deeper, stronger foundation. The earth uses everything towards her purpose, transforming waste into nourishment, and even using disasters as opportunities to cleanse, and start anew. She reminds us that contentment, or *santosha*, serves us through all the duties and requirements of our lives. Age after age the earth continues on through cycles of growth that support all her children, so that they too may learn, evolve and enjoy the playground of life. May we stand firm upon the force of her gravity and become more established in our own resolve to live up to our fullest potential.

Water is adaptable and receptive to change. The more points of view we can accommodate, the more knowledge can infuse our minds. Although each tradition has its followers, we can be open to the views

of the others. The same source feeds all the rivers. They all flow downward collectively towards the lowest point, the truth to which we all return. As we learn and honour the history from which we came, we find increasingly effective ways to create new pathways. The more fluid we are, the easier it is to pierce through blockages in our way. Rigidity is shattered, while flexibility finds a way. It also reminds us of *shauca*, or purity, and that the truth blooms like the lotus through the mire. May we remember to nourish our roots and be receptive to the beauty in the changes around us.

If we hope to remain leaders in any field, we must bring a certain level of intensity to show. Fire, like *tapas*, or austerity, brings us a burning aspiration for the highest and an ambition for excellence. Always moving upwards, it uses every resource in its path towards its goal. At the deepest level, there is a longing to awaken. When this deep burning passion arises, it encompasses and overwhelms all worldly desires. It lies awaiting an intensity of awareness, like the sunlight warms the seed before it can sprout into form. May we shine our light brightly for ourselves and for others, by bringing energy to what is important in our hearts.

The air is quick-moving, flexible and resourceful. Like our minds, it can dart in all directions or it can be harnessed in the wise application towards a goal. Study, or *svādhyāya*, requires attention, focus and concentration, all qualities of a bright and active mind. Our intelligence can serve us well. When we study what happens in the self during *asana*, we are yoking the mind and body. When we study the scriptures we learn from the best of what humankind has to offer and find inspiration that enlivens us. So much wisdom has come before us, if we would only set our sails to the wind at our backs, we can be taken far on our journey. Let each breath remind us to focus our attention, so that we may use our resources wisely and lean towards directions that enhance our lives.

May Spring remind us of our connection to the elements: to the fresh breeze of air that moves us to learn; to the fire that burns within and lights our way; to the water that nourishes and changes us; to the earth that supports and nourishes us; and to the space that encompasses our expansion through form. May we remember the dance of the elements reflected within ourselves and utilize them to create the highest evolution of joy in our own universe. May we shine as beacons of warmth and light for all those who are eagerly awaiting the thaw.

Author's note after printing: I wish to thank John Friend for providing the impetus for writing this article. It is very unfortunate that John Friend did not also embody the *yamas*, or disciplines of yoga, i.e. *ahimsa* (non-violence), *satya* (truthfulness), *asteya* (non-stealing), *brhmacharya* (celibacy or restraint from sexual misconduct), and *aparigraha* (nonclinging), as these would indeed have protected him, and saved him from his fall from grace. Yoga is a very powerful path that can bring great rewards. Injury can ensue, however, when the proper foundations have not been laid.