Memories of Guruji for tribute

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On my last visit to Pune, late in 2013, Guruji was celebrating his 95th birthday. I could see he was thinner than on previous visits. He had given up the stairs for an elevator, but he was in the practice hall, astounding us still with his ability to hold back arches for prolonged periods; or working with his granddaughter Abhijata to penetrate a pose. Other times we would see him playing with his great granddaughter, Satvika or conducting business sitting in the lower hall.

Before I arrived in Pune that year, I had written to him to seek his help with a severe shoulder injury. One of my first days at the institute, he called me over to see how much movement I had in the arm. He said, ‘this will not change fast.”

He willingly worked with me in medical class and gave me a sequence of poses that has ultimately helped me re-gain the use of my arm. He was preparing to entertain the world at his birthday, and yet, he made time to help me. I will always treasure the memory of his touch, his care, and his attention.

As he worked with me, all the foreign teachers crowded to see what he was doing. Then some of those teachers would assist me with my practice because I required more than one set of hands to hold down my shoulder, of lift my chest. One day, he came upon me in the modified Urdhva mukha svanasana I had been given. As he adjusted what I was doing, he scowled at me*, ‘You* have to remember.” I was chastised, but will not forget! How could I not remember?? I was almost afraid to return the next day, yet, still I did not want to miss his care and eagle eye.

When I took my leave of him for the last time, I knelt down, and he asked, about the shoulder.

The life had started to return to my injured arm, and I said it is improving. And then he smiled, “God Bless you.” I hated to leave his side. Now it is more profound, as it was the last time I would see those eyes with such strength, wisdom, and depth of compassion.

The visit preceding this was 2010.

On that visit, there was a smaller scale celebration for his 92nd birthday. At the evening discourse, Guruji made this profound statement: “We say we do yoga for health, we must do it to spread yoga. We must go inside and spread the skin….I am measuring the universe in my body.”

On several occasions during that visit, he spoke to me while he was at this desk at the library. I asked about his projects in Bellur. There was damage to the water tank, and it had to be rebuilt, also a wall had to be constructed around the school, clinic and other buildings in a large compound named for his wife, Ramamani. Since there are young girls at the school- it was necessary to take precautions. I said “Ramamani Fort” this got him laughing. Also he explained the children who have now completed high school want to continue studying. He realized the money needed to start a college would have to be enough to sustain it even if he is not there.

A few days later, I spoke to him after I had returned from a visit to Wadia College. I had taken the opportunity to talk about yoga and to teach a few poses to the students. The students asked me why I kept coming to India. I looked at Guruji and related that I said:“…..because of you Guruji. You are the living master of yoga.”

He reminisced with, “ I visited there in the 30’s but no one who had been there then would still be there.”

Another day, he said he had spent three hours on his correspondence. I commented that this would leave him very little time to do his own writing. “Yes, I am writing a new book on the sutras tracing the links. There are 15 chapters, I have rewritten 3 or 4 times.”

(this would have been the *Core of the Yoga* *Sutras*.) He was sitting with paper and pen, as he wrote all his books by hand and then others would type up his manuscripts. “Now I must read this latest draft and make corrections.”

During morning classes in these later years, he would be practicing at the side of the hall while his granddaughter Abhjiata was teaching. One day he exclaimed, “You came to learn we should see change. Learn to do and do to learn. Connect intelligence of side ribs to heels…”

One of my most memorable visits was the magical mystery tour of south India when Guruji accompanied us in 2008 on his 90th birthday to Bellur, Mysore, Bangalore and the temples of Karnataka. Three hundred of us travelled around by bus. We were entertained royally; we ate dinners and had a picnic with him at our side. And I could see his joy and pride as we got to see the fruits of the Bellur trust: the children performing, the school, the clinic, water tank, and beautiful new Patanjali temple. The Brahmin priests prepared and served all 300 of us lunch, cooking in huge pots out side the new guest house.!

Each interaction with him was fresh, and intense. He was passionate when teaching, wanting for us to catch his insights, to practice and understand for ourselves. He was teacher, family man, healer, scientist, artist, philosopher, author, humanitarian, and friend.

Everything he did he did from the heart,

With deepest gratitude,

Leslie Hogya