



My GURU APPEARS

On the 15th May 2001 I came to the realization that 'my way' did not work. The harder I tried; the more I worried about the problems I had created; the more disconnected from reality I had become. I felt controlled by my emotions and unable to see a solution to my problems.

On that day I stopped drinking alcohol or taking any other mood or mind altering substance. I embarked on life without any chemical agent to numb the pain of being me.

I started seeing a psychiatrist, doing cognitive behavioural therapy with a psychologist and joined a 12 step program. I purchased a bookshelf full of self- help books. In September of that year the psychologist I was seeing suggested that perhaps I should start some form of exercise. So a friend and I enrolled into a yoga class at the Lakshmi Centre in North Geelong.

The class involved a visualisation, some gentle asanas, breathing exercises, yoga nidra and a short meditation. I absolutely loved the classes. I would arrive tired and always leave invigorated. I would attend two or three classes a week. I made friends in the class and I felt like a member of a community. I felt like I belonged.

The class was invited to attend a workshop on relationships. The class would be facilitated by the Guru of Samata Yoga – Swami Durgananda.

Attending the workshop was to be the wisest decision I have made. My clearest memory of that day was when Swami looked at me. It was like she was looking deeply into me; seeing all of me; seeing those aspects of my personality that I didn't want anyone to see. At that moment I realized she could see all of me – she smiled. She did not turn away from me in disgust, she did not look horrified – she simply smiled. The smile did not say it's all OK; what you have become is appropriate; what you believe is correct. It simply said – I see you and I love you.

Several months later I attended my first Samata Yoga three day retreat. My body ached from sitting on the floor for hours, I felt uncomfortably self-conscious when chanting and it was cold. I developed an almost debilitating headache. Swami asked me 'why are you here?' and I knew she didn't mean at the retreat. The question shattered some aspect of my ego. It challenged me to question who I was, what I was doing and what I wanted. The experience was far from pleasant. It is painful to realize that at 37 years of age I had no answer to the question, 'why are you here?'

On the Saturday evening of the retreat 3 people took Diksha. An initiation ceremony into the Samata Samashti Dharma lineage. When one of the aspirants had his mantra whispered into his ear by Swami Durgananda, I knew he had been changed. Whatever had just happened to him I wanted. Twelve months later my Guru whispered my own personal mantra into my ear when I received Diksha from her.

In the early years I would often feel challenged and uncomfortable. Swami would continue to ask me difficult questions which I would have no answer for. She would offer me pieces

of advice like- 'its time you grew up.' It took me weeks to recover from the 'insult' inflicted by that statement.

Of course I did need to grow up. Those patterns of thought and behaviours (Samskaras) that served me as a child no longer served any worthwhile purpose.

I have had no 'profound spiritual experience.' My sadhana has been of the educational variety. But Swami is a great teacher.

She has given me the tools to grow and change. She has taught me how to breathe. She has shown me the gift of mouna. The practice of Sila has enabled me to experience the beauty of the present moment. She has taught me how to eat; how to clean myself; how to relax; how to meditate; how to be present; how to honestly view my experience; how to let go; how to chant; how to laugh; how to cry; how to be real and most importantly how to love God.

But of course she can only give me the tools – the life I create will depend on how well I use them.

She has always loved me; she loves me when I don't love myself.

KABIR