

Dear Students, Friends, Teachers and Loved Ones,

Thank you for your patience. It has been more than three months since I last wrote to you in this space. Out of respect for your time, I had hoped to write you a short letter. Despite the time it has taken to complete it, I've been unable to make it as short as I would have preferred. It seems there is a lot to say about the path ahead—both for ParaYoga as well as myself. Trying to capture all of this in writing has felt far from adequate because one, it is hard to convey the extent to which I feel humbled, and two, while I've learned much in this interim, I am clearly still learning.

I understand some who might receive this letter will have no interest in my apologies, remorse, or anything else I have to say. I offer you my respect on this, as well as my sincere regrets, sadness for the loss of our relationship, and acceptance of your decision. I truly wish you only peace and happiness.

I have done my best to take in the varied responses to my transgression—from condemnation and cancellation to expressions of support, and everything in between. Knowing that my actions have hurt and pained so many in the ParaYoga community that I've truly cared for, has made this a sad time for me personally. Clearly, it has been a most challenging time for all. As I sit with this pain, I continue to pray for guidance in how to best repair the harm done to the community, as skillfully as possible.

Shortly after my last letter, I began what has been a three-month hiatus from teaching. I have used this time to turn inward, to reflect on many important questions and to consider how—in the light of healing and repair for the community—ParaYoga and I would evolve. Evolve we must.

As I acknowledged in my last letter, one cannot change the past; one can only learn from it. There is only going forward. Again, I've prayed—a lot—to consciously and compassionately grow in understanding and evolve personally. Part of this has included working with a remarkable therapist, specializing in the Right Use of Power. I've also sought out advice and expertise as it relates to rebuilding culture within organizations, creating more inclusive and cooperative leadership models. Further in this letter, I share more about how we intend to implement some of what has been learned.

I am indeed humbled for not having recognized and resolved the causes that led to my actions and their unintended consequences. I continue to commit to learning all I can. I understand that a process of repair, and the gradual rebuilding of trust, for those who are open to it, will be a *process*—collectively and individually. It will take time, but that is

what my practice, conscience and care for those whom I have hurt demands. I am committed to remain steady in my aim for healing and restoration.

My time away from teaching has been devoted to soul-searching. It has been raw, deep, and far from easy. It has been a look into the darkness of what I had not previously seen or known. While I am still learning, I now recognize that I did not fully appreciate the subtle dynamics of the power differential between student and teacher. To be clear, this lack of true understanding predates my ethical transgression. For thirty eight years, much of my understanding on the subject was more a matter of right and wrong, do's and don'ts. It was enough to have acted accordingly, and to maintain this critical and most basic boundary between teacher-student. However, I now realize that I had not fully grasped the inherent complexities and fragilities of the power differential between teacher and taught.

What I am learning is that the presence of deep care, even love, is vital if a spiritual learning environment is going to flourish yet, the very presence of unequal roles can so easily cloud clear perception for both parties—the teacher and the taught. The good of the work is often over-idealized and when expectations are not met, the bad can also become oversized, for both teacher and student. However—no matter what—it is solely the person in the “up-power” position (teacher) who is responsible for maintaining the safety, integrity and sanctity of the relationship.

My personal process and training of these past months has awakened me to a new appreciation for this sacredness, along with its inherent vulnerabilities that the teacher is entrusted to maintain—a trust I failed to uphold. This knowledge will inform my teaching forever. I am so thankful for the extraordinary guidance I've received and continue to receive on the subject. As I wrote earlier, I'm not done, but I have been changed.

In addition to deep personal work and education, I have asked myself again and again: “How do I regain trust, where it can be regained?” This has in part led me to seriously consider the path to ParaYoga's evolution—namely, its culture, its leadership model and the way it functions as an organization. Indeed, to those who have been asking about the continuation of ParaYoga, the answer is: yes, an unequivocal yes—albeit with changes.

Reflecting upon the matter, some of the changes I would like to see us consider as a community include the following:

- a restructuring of the power dynamic of the organization
- greater shared decision-making, input and opportunity to shape the organization on an on-going basis
- evolve culturally. I understand there have been varying levels of frustration, even hurt, about ParaYoga's culture in the past. It is my desire to see us become a more compassionate, inclusive organization.
- I commit myself to being more responsive, specifically, more open to feedback and accountable to it.
- I endeavor to promote qualified certified ParaYoga teachers so that they can lead more ParaYoga Master Trainings—thereby empowering them to certify future ParaYoga teachers.
- Finally, I wish to create a more purposeful mentoring program, wherein I work closely (in ways I never have before) with those who are most interested in stepping into the highest leadership and teaching roles. In other words, set a viable succession plan for ParaYoga's sustainability after I have "retired," an inevitability for all of us sooner or later.

Furthermore, one of the ethics committee's prescribed steps in the healing and repair process was recently completed—"Listening Circles." These "Listening Circles," were facilitated by psychotherapists from The Right Use of Power Institute. They were open to all members of the community. I was neither a participant nor observer so that participants could process and share freely and openly. After they were completed I received an anonymous collection of the shared responses. These have been posted on the ParaYoga website, which you can view [here](#). I am currently engaged in addressing these points, including the explicit desire on the part of many that ParaYoga should continue.

Concurrently, I have drawn from a wide cross-section of those who felt inspired to share their ideas, skills, concerns, desires, and even disappointments, regarding possible future organizational models. However, I soon realized that if I was going to fulfill my pledge for greater collaboration, I would need to step into a different, more shared role in any decision-making that would follow.

Fortuitously, a dear and longtime member of the ParaYoga community, also a highly experienced creator of culture outside of this community, came forward and suggested [World Cafe](#), a specific collaborative model. She has subsequently offered to lead a community-wide gathering to develop ideas and a vision for ParaYoga's next

incarnation, applying this World Cafe cooperative model which welcomes all input. Anyone who wishes to offer theirs will be able to do so.

This gathering will take place **January 9th**. My hope is that if you are inspired in any way, and believe you have some insight on matters regarding the future viability of ParaYoga, I would ask you to consider being a part of it—contributing your thoughts, perspective and intentions. **You'll receive an invitation with more details for this event in the coming days.*

This virtual World Cafe community gathering will be a pivotal part of the process for the re-creation of the ParaYoga organization: the way it looks, feels and operates going forward. I will not be participating in the actual World Cafe event so as to not influence the collective vision of what ParaYoga can become. Instead, I will be one of twelve (more or less) committee members, each of whom have independently stepped forward at some point over the past few months, volunteering to help shape the community of which they will be a part. The committee's role will be to distill the conscience of the World Cafe collective, and serve to implement its wishes. There may still be some committee spots to fill.

As to the future of my teaching...

Some senior and other certified teachers have chosen to leave ParaYoga. I have expressed to many of them directly that I continue to feel love for them and wish them only the best in their future endeavors. At the same time, many others have expressed their intention to stay—with a deep, heartfelt desire to be part of what's next. They've communicated their wish to embrace this opportunity to evolve ParaYoga and set a new, exemplary model, for the greater yoga community, of what can come when collective compassion and collaboration are applied in response to a crisis.

Forms come and go, but one's essence continues to seek its most meaningful and joyous expression. For me, teaching and sharing, to the best of my ability and from the depths of my heart, is part of my essence; therefore, I will continue to do so, in new and ever-evolving forms. I feel catalyzed to intentionally elevate those who are teaching ParaYoga. Thus, ParaYoga will continue. Alongside other ParaYoga Certified Teachers, I will soon resume offering training in this system that I have taught for decades.

I wholeheartedly intend to, in collaboration, do what I can to configure a material shift that elevates all those who are dedicated to these teachings into positions of greater power—both in how they are disseminated and how the organization is shaped as a whole. For those who choose to carry forth its legacy into a sustainable and vital future,

I intend to work with you in ways that entrust you to share the full expression of ParaYoga's values: Self-mastery, Integrity, Guardianship, Empowerment, Compassion, and Love of Life.

Of all the treasures described in the yoga tradition, perhaps none is held in higher regard than discernment. I think we can agree that just because a narrative is driven on social media or the internet does not necessarily make it true. All too often when the worst of what we read confirms our darkest beliefs or concerns we are often led to see it as fact (i.e., confirmation bias). It doesn't take long before a narrative takes on a life of its own. These months have made it clear to me that life is almost never "black or white." It is mostly lived in shades of gray, and that is where Truth is found.

The effort to understand our differences whenever or wherever they occur, offers the opportunity to elevate our decency and compassion. We can be made better by entering into it and including the other, instead of canceling them. It is in that gray area where the widening of acceptance of self and other—the diversity of needs and concerns of a community—exists. It is also the expanded embrace of the whole of life and destiny, the crux of healing, and the beginning of repair perhaps for serving something larger than ourselves.

Recently I received an email from a long-time student that included the following sentence: "You have always held me with unconditional love, and always treated me with the utmost integrity." While I understand that I may not have impacted all my students in this way, it has always been my intent to do so—to teach and to engage with students so that they felt cared for and treated with integrity; that they felt truly safe. To those who have felt anything other than this, who have been impacted in any other way, I am truly sorry.

These past months have been a painful reckoning, no doubt. But they have also presented an extraordinary opportunity for learning. I know this has and will continue to change the course of my teaching and life. To the extent that I continue to implement the lessons I have learned thus far, I will live and teach with greater understanding and compassion—doing my utmost to serve the greater good.

Respectfully,
Yogarupa Rod Stryker