Memories of Dr. Motoyama

Memories from My Time with Dr. Hiroshi Motoyama

By Tim Laporte, Vice Chair and Secretary, CIHS Board of Trustees

It is difficult for me to know where to begin when describing my years studying with Dr. Hiroshi Motoyama. He was the most remarkable person I have ever met — not because of one standout trait, but because so many rare qualities seemed to coexist in him at once. I will share a few memories that, I hope, convey something of who he was beyond what can be gleaned from his books.

I first encountered Dr. Motoyama's work in 2002, when I found *Toward a Superconsciousness: Meditational Theory and Practice* in Princeton University's Firestone Library during my sophomore year. The book initially perplexed me, but it eventually redirected my life. In it, he describes a path of meditational experience that leads toward union with the Divine, along with various "superconscious" capacities that may arise along the way. I switched my major to Religion because the possibility that such direct experience might be real — and repeatable — felt like a question worth reorganizing a life around.

As my studies continued, my questions only deepened. I searched for Dr. Motoyama online and discovered the CIHS, the graduate school he founded in Encinitas, California. I ordered more of his books and read them quickly. During a senior-year study abroad trip to Bodh Gaya, India, I experienced meditation-related phenomena that I could not easily dismiss. After that, further academic study without deeper practice began to feel like an empty road. I wanted guidance that was serious, careful, and grounded. After graduating, I moved across the country to Encinitas to study at CIHS.

When I arrived in the fall of 2005, it felt auspicious that my first opportunity to meet Dr. Motoyama came during a weekend public lecture on *Toward a Superconsciousness* — the very book that had introduced me to him three years earlier. After the second day, a line formed at his desk, and I waited my turn, heart thumping. When I reached him, I introduced myself as a new student and told him how much his work had meant to me.

He looked straight at me, smiled, and said warmly, "Yes, it is good to meet you too." Then he paused and added, "You have a good understanding. Study hard so that you can be a teacher here someday."

In the moment I was so nervous that his words did not fully land. Only later did I realize how unusual that comment was at a first meeting. Looking back now — after becoming a professor, and then Vice Chair of the CIHS Board — it seems clear that he perceived

something about the direction my life would take. I later learned that many people had similar experiences: without being told anything, he would say something that spoke directly to their circumstances, or to a path not yet fully visible to them. He sometimes described this kind of perception in terms of what he called the Purusha dimension: a standpoint beyond ordinary time, from which the threads of a life can appear with clarity.

That first meeting was also my first personal encounter with the extrasensory abilities (*siddhi*) that had fascinated me in his writings. Before I met him, I wondered what a person endowed with such abilities would be like in daily life. Would he be constantly demonstrating them? Would they dominate every conversation?

What surprised me was how natural he was. In public lectures he sometimes spoke generally about unusual perceptions — such as awareness of previous lives — but he usually avoided identifying details. In private, among family and close disciples, he could be remarkably specific. Over time, I came to believe his public restraint was intentional: he did not want sensational details to eclipse the teaching itself, and he knew such details would be misunderstood by people unprepared to receive them.

He was equally careful with information about others. He once explained that as spiritual development deepens, one may begin to perceive sensitive "secrets" in another person's mind — memories, fears, karmic patterns, private burdens. It might be tempting to share what one sees, whether to impress others or to "help" the person. But he insisted that it is unethical to reveal such knowledge unless the individual is mature and stable enough to integrate it. The duty of a spiritually advanced person, he said, is to protect what is seen until the proper time arrives.

I learned what that restraint looked like in a small, personal way. Early in 2006 he made a few comments to me in class that seemed oddly connected to Germany, a country I had never visited. The next day he asked where my ancestors came from. I mentioned my mother's English background; then I added that my father's side had immigrated from Germany a little over a hundred years earlier. He brightened immediately: "Yes — Germany!" Much later, when the time was right, he told me that we had shared a lifetime together in medieval Germany as Christian monks, and that I had been his student then as well. It was clear to me that he had known this long before he said it. He simply waited until I could receive it with steadiness rather than fascination.

His discernment also shaped the way he taught. In public lectures he paid close attention to whether people could follow and whether the discussion would be useful. There were moments — especially when he spoke about advanced states of yogic superconsciousness — when confusion would spread and the shared connection would falter. At those points he would sometimes stop abruptly, even mid-sentence, and say, with a gentle finality, "Okay, that's enough for today." He would not push people past what they could genuinely digest.

I share these memories to emphasize something subtle: Dr. Motoyama did possess expanded abilities, yet he used them with humility and restraint. He shared what was helpful and withheld what would distract. And after spending enough time with him, what had once seemed fantastical gradually felt less exotic — not because I stopped being amazed, but because the extraordinary was woven into a relationship that was also, in many respects, ordinary. He was my spiritual teacher and guide, yes, but he was also my academic advisor and the chair of my dissertation committee. Over time he became, unexpectedly, like a grandfather to me: a source of human wisdom, warmth, and — dare I say it — friendship.

We often imagine that the enlightened person must be completely other, so perfected that the human element disappears. Many sainthood stories reinforce this, until the saint becomes an icon and the person fades into legend. But one of the most important lessons I learned from Dr. Motoyama is that when the Divine works through a human being, it does more than produce unusual abilities. It also shapes the personality in ways we can recognize, learn from, and apply to daily life. Now that he has passed, it is these human qualities — the grandfatherly and friendly aspects — that I find myself missing and reflecting on the most.

The first was his profound curiosity. One might assume that a person with deep contemplative insight would "have all the answers" and therefore lose interest in ordinary matters. Dr. Motoyama was the opposite. Although he certainly did have many answers, he also had a voracious appetite for learning and took genuine delight in the world. He was fascinated by a wide variety of subjects: history, linguistics, paleontology, evolutionary biology, neuroscience, electrical engineering, human physiology, traditional Chinese medicine, contemporary medicine, philosophy, psychology (especially Jungian), mathematics, comparative religion, logic, computer science, physics, and much more. He could become absorbed in detailed conversations about any of these, and his face would light up when someone asked a difficult question.

This challenged the familiar portrait of the mystic as aloof from ordinary life, striving to free themselves from the material world. Whatever role solitude and fierce discipline may play at certain stages of training, Dr. Motoyama's mature mysticism did not lead him to shun reality. If anything, it led him toward deeper engagement with it. The same awareness that elevated his consciousness seemed to renew an elemental, almost childlike wonder toward existence itself.

Closely related to this was another unexpected lesson: he did not treat "spiritual information" as inherently more valuable than other kinds of knowledge. I attended lectures where he spoke about electrical engineering with as much enthusiasm as when he discoursed on spiritual topics. This surprised me at first, because I assumed the spiritual must always be more precious. But to him, the whole fabric of reality seemed worthy of study and awe. From that perspective, the "spiritual" is not a separate realm set above the rest; it is a dimension of the same astonishing universe.

There are many other facets of his personality I could describe. He carried a positive, optimistic demeanor that was refreshing to be around. He could be quite funny and laughed fully and heartily when circumstances called for it — laughter that could light up a lecture hall. I also watched him embody a principle the *Bhagavad Gita* teaches: give full effort to the task before you while remaining unattached to the outcome. This was quite evident in his work on behalf of CIHS and in his selfless goal of building it up for the benefit of the whole world. Finally, he consistently showed genuine concern for helping others grow into their capacities. He mentored patiently, and he served many people through counseling and spiritual healing practices such as *goshinsen*.

There is much more I could say, and if I tried to tell every story, I am sure it could fill a book. For now, I hope these memories convey at least a glimpse of what made Dr. Hiroshi Motoyama so remarkable: not only his gifts, but his restraint, his humanity, his joy in learning, and his care for others. I remain grateful for the privilege of studying closely with him for more than six years, and I trust that his broader work will continue to unfold in its influence over time.