

DMY LOAY 200-Hour TT of February 2007:
An Overview of One *Sadhaka*'s Experience – Adam Frei

Introduction

Prior to finding my way to Sri Dharma Mittra and the Dharma Yoga Center, I had been a student of Yoga for some years. Personal practice led me to think about becoming certified as a teacher of Yoga to share some of the bliss I had discovered with others and to deepen my understanding of the science of Yoga. When I came to the Dharma Yoga Center and first encountered Sri Dharma Mittra, I had a glorious sense of homecoming. Here was a *yogacharya* of vast experience teaching on an almost daily basis without pretense or pageantry, but with sincerity and a wonderful sense of humor. Many so-called “star” teachers will dazzle you with the virtuosity of their physical practice, yet with Sri Dharma it is always an organic outgrowth of his teaching. He will never demonstrate an advanced posture without outlining the steps that one ought to take to arrive at the end point. Sri Dharma also weaves into his teaching central points from The Bhagavad Gita and The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali in such a way that the students learn the core principles of Yogic philosophy as part of any class. I attended class as often as my schedule allowed and began to consider applying for the teacher training certification offered by the Dharma Yoga Center.

My work schedule and family graciously allowed me to take the ten days I would need to be available for the February 2007 teacher training intensive. The required reading primed and fascinated me in the months before the training commenced. The training itself exceeded expectation in every conceivable way and was responsible for a surge forward in personal progress and I came to know many things that I only partially understood prior to the training. Most days during the actual intensive, we did five to seven hours of postures in gentle to vigorous class and small group settings, in addition to *prananyama* or breathing exercises and seated concentration at regular intervals. My assumption heading into the training was that I would be overwhelmed physically and mentally. In actuality, physically, I never felt better and I managed to absorb a remarkable amount of information in a rather compressed timeframe. What follows is an overview of my experience of the “Life of a Yogi” 200-hour Teacher Training from February of 2007.

Day One

We began our teacher training on a frigid Thursday morning at 7:15 AM with chanting, *pranayama* and meditation. Our instructor and was Sri Dharma Mittra, the reason why many of us had chosen this particular Yoga teacher training course. The heat at the Kailashanada Temple did not seem to be on, but it was still a good deal warmer inside than on the street two floors below. We sat in a large circle in the carpeted end of the studio with Sri Dharma and his harmonium at the head of the room, flanked by his disciples. There was a profound simplicity steeped in deep truth that informed each morning's session and made it a highlight of the day every day of the training. There was the sweet smell of incense and the underlying dynamic of individuals arriving from different places merging into *sanga* or community. We did more chanting than anything else that first morning as Sri Dharma led us through traditional mantras in a responsive,

kirtan manner with bits of wisdom given along the way. Although a little drowsy on the subway ride in, my mind soon became clear and one-pointed during those forty-five minutes of awakening and stillness.

A little past eight o'clock, Ismrittee Devi Om and Chandra Om gave us practical information about the days ahead and generally outlined the course of study. Ismrittee Devi also had us go around the circle, introduce ourselves and tell a bit about what had brought us to this place for this training. People had come from as far away as Japan and Bolivia and from as near as Brooklyn and Queens. All of us shared a desire to take our personal practice to the next level and to learn how to transmit and share the various techniques of Yoga with others.

At ten o'clock, we took a Dharma Mittra Yoga Level I Class taught by Andrei Ram. For most of us, this was our first exposure to the *asana-pranayama-dharana* sequence we would come to know best over the next ten days. At noon, my entire teacher training group took Sri Dharma Mittra's Level IV Master Class, along with some of the regulars from the community-at-large who frequent Sri Dharma's daily courses. Sri Dharma taught us in his gracious and direct manner that always seems to bring out the best in everyone. It was of interest to look around and see where everyone was starting from and as the ten days flew-by, incredible to witness where everyone ended-up.

At 2 PM, we had our first encounter with The Bhagavad Gita, a sacred text which is fundamental to both Hinduism and traditional *Hatha-Raja* Yoga. The text had been part of our required reading for the training and it was no great surprise to learn that the book is central to Sri Dharma's outlook on life. After giving a synopsis of the events depicted in The Bhagavad Gita and explaining how it fits within the larger story told by The Mahabharata, Sri Dharma had us go around the room and read selected passages from the actual text. He used the selected passages as speaking points to then elucidate the deeper meaning of the story and demonstrate why it is central to the Yogic philosophy of his lineage.

At 3:15 PM, we were taught to lead the Level I sequence with great attention to detail by Sri Dharma Mittra and his senior teachers. The *vinyasas* which begin the sequence were broken down into their constituent parts and the *asanas* were demonstrated, deconstructed and analyzed. The same treatment was rendered to the remaining postures of Level I and we were taught how to lead the guided relaxation, *pranayama* and *dharana* with which it concludes.

At 5:30 PM, one third of the teacher training group took a Gentle Yoga class, while the balance of the group had a break for dinner. At 6:30 PM, we all re-formed to round out the day with another Level I class. After having been taught the sequence so thoroughly during the afternoon, we experienced the class in a different way. Some of us began plotting-out how we would teach the class, as we would be expected to do in small groups beginning Sunday morning.

Day Two

Our morning began at 7:15 AM with all of us arriving in *mouna* or silence and taking our places in the circle for chanting, *pranayama* and meditation led by Sri Dharma Mittra. Early morning is an auspicious time for *sadhana* or spiritual practice. The mind is clear, the body refreshed and the seeker finds him or herself easily drawn in-ward to where truth resides. The morning's session was extended, as we segued directly into a practicum on meditation until about 9:30 AM. This experiential workshop allowed one to delve into a wide array of strategies for taming the ever-in motion "monkey mind". Techniques were presented that could be of use to any *sadhaka* or spiritual aspirant and in almost any circumstance.

At 10:00 AM, we took a Level I class as a group and experienced a sense of communal consciousness as we began to move and breathe together. This phenomenon continued throughout the course of the ten days until it seemed that we moved and breathed as one from the beginning to the end of a given class. Half of us had the privilege to stay-on and take Sri Dharma Mittra's Level IV class at noon, while the other half of the teacher training group had two hours free for lunch. One of the great features of all the classes we took during the ten-day intensive was the presence and participation of assisting teachers. The help that they so generously gave to supplement the main teacher was often revelatory and always greatly appreciated.

At two o'clock, we re-convened as a group to learn about various methods of purification, again, from Sri Dharma himself. He taught us about *jala neti*, *nauli*, *trataka*, *kappalabhati* and various other *kriyas*. We all used our neti pots together and had fun making a huge mess. At about three or so, we moved into a study of The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali led by Sri Dharma Mittra and Chandra Om. Sri Dharma used various sutras to define and expound upon the main precepts of Yoga. In a relatively brief session, he explained why The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali are a cornerstone of Yogic philosophy and form a basic blueprint for *Hatha-Raja* Yoga.

From 4:45-5:45 PM, we had *satsang* with Sri Dharma Mittra (*satsang* is gathering as a community to hear spiritual discourse and ask questions of the Guru) and at six o'clock; our entire teacher training group took a Dharma Mittra Yoga Level II class which was taught by Sri Dharma. Level II is also part of the curriculum for the 200-hour certification and we were all mindful of the proceedings that evening. There's something very special about doing *sadhana* with a group of like-minded individuals under the guidance of a master-teacher. Even better is when nature cooperates by making a graceful transition from evening into night as you practice.

The Level II class flowed directly into "Purification and Psychic Development" with Sri Dharma Mittra. A good number of people from the larger community came in for this class and there were quite a few of us seated close to Sri Dharma at one end of the temple. My work schedule had never permitted me to attend these evening classes and I found them to be quite profound. The exercises, chanting, mantras and meditations seemed to naturally complement everything we had been learning up to this point. When this class concluded, my group shared a vegetarian potluck dinner and had a chance to

socialize and get to know each other a little better. An optional *kirtan* led by Mittra Om began around nine and I think my entire teacher training group slipped-out in favor of some much needed rest and recuperation.

Day Three

Following our 7:15 AM chanting, *pranayama* and meditation session led by Sri Dharma Mittra, Sri Dharma presented, demonstrated and had us try an incredible assortment of *pranayams* or controlled breathing techniques. Feeling the effects of the various *pranayams* reinforced the power of this practice and the sheer volume of material covered in this hour-and-a-half session was enormous.

At around 9:30 AM, Sri Dharma Mittra gave a lecture concerning the composition of the subtle body, its sheaths and the way the system of 72,000 *nadis* or psychic channels relate to the physical body and the world around us. One of the best features of these two sessions was Sri Dharma taking time at the end to answer questions. People asked questions first about the subjects just covered, then about more personal and unrelated matters. Along the way, we learned much about each other and got Sri Dharma's perspective on a broad range of topics.

At noon, half the teacher training class had an hour-and-a-half for lunch, while the other half of the group took a Level III Yoga class led by Bernadette Dhutu. As one of the senior teachers at the Center, Bernadette has completely absorbed Sri Dharma's methods and style, yet she still has a way of making each class she teaches her own. At 1:30 PM, the other half of the class got to take an hour-and-a-half Level I class with Kim Jeblick. As Kim had been there for almost every class that included *asana* as an assist thus far in the training, it was great to now experience her as the primary teacher. Her deep background in dance, personal training, Pilates and Yoga combine to make her assists and her teaching impactful.

By three o'clock, we were all together again for a session on adapting the Level I sequence as Prenatal Yoga. The instructor was Isitri Om and, with her infectious laugh, she explained the fundamentals for teaching women in varying trimesters and the radical changes a woman's body undergoes when pregnant. We learned what is safe to attempt for the pregnant woman and how this ancient spiritual discipline can serve those passing through this momentous time in their lives.

At 5:30 PM, Andrei Ram led Sri Dharma's three-hour class called *Maha Sadhana* or Great Practice. This course combines much of the material covered in the various classes Sri Dharma teaches over the course of a given week. My entire teacher training group got to take this class, along with a good number of people from the outside. The class combined elements of Sri Dharma Mittra's "Purification and Psychic Development" and our morning chanting, *pranayama* and meditation with a central, rigorous *asana* sequence which hovered between the posture sequence of Dharma Mittra Yoga Levels III and IV. The class was epic in length, but somehow just sped by. Andrei Ram is a masterful teacher who manages to channel not only Sri Dharma's spirit, but also imparts

his own sense of joy in sharing this precious knowledge. The *Maha Sadhana* program was a high point of the training for my entire teacher training class.

Day Four

Senior disciple and teacher Chandra Om led Sunday morning's 7:15 AM *pranayama* and meditation session. At eight o'clock, we were broken down into small groups for the first time. In my group were three others: a woman from Tokyo, one from the Former Soviet Union and one from San Francisco. Our group leader was Aundre Chin, a familiar presence at the Dharma Yoga Center. Our small group was an opportunity for each of us to practice leading the Level I sequence under the able guidance of one who knew it intimately. After someone had taught the full class, everyone would go around to give first positive comments, then suggestions. My small group was a wonderful mix of personalities and we learned a lot from each other over the remaining days of the training. Aundre was knowledgeable and drew from a rich well of personal experience to guide us each day we met with him.

From 9:30-11:30 AM, we had our first crash course in anatomy with Dr. Jeffrey Meyers. The sheer volume of information that he shared with us in that morning and in the subsequent afternoon sessions seems somewhat fantastic when I look back at the copious notes I took that day. I came away knowing more than I ever thought I would about the body human and it definitely planted the desire within me to want to learn more.

At noon, half the group had a wonderful experience of Dharma Mittra Yoga Level II led by Kim Jeblick while the other half of the class had a break for lunch. From 1:30 PM on, the entire group reconvened for lectures with Dr. Jeffrey Meyers, first on anatomy, then on the treatment of injury or illness using postures and techniques from the Yogic arsenal.

From 6:30-8:00 PM, we had a workshop on inversions with Chandra Om, Aundre Chin and Andrei Ram. Inversions are often a part of Sri Dharma Mittra's advanced posture sequences and it was illuminating to see some of them demonstrated and to hear techniques for guiding those less experienced into and out of them.

At 8:00 PM, we had an hour-and-a-half session with Chandra Om. The topic was to be The Bhagavad Gita, but these sessions often turned on Chandra asking us if we had any questions. Chandra is a *yogini* whose whole life is dedicated as loving service to her Guru. At this Sunday night session, Chandra related the story of her life to this point. She then told us much about what it is to be an actual *yogi* or *yogini* and what it means to be a true teacher of Yoga. All of us within my teacher training group had come from different places and life experiences and many among us found much to ruminate on in the things Chandra said during these sessions over the next few days

Day Five

Day five began again with chanting, *pranayama* and meditation, I believe led by Andrei Ram. By 8:00 AM, we were all in our small groups, practicing the art of teaching and transmitting *Hatha-Raja* Yoga through the medium of the Level I sequence. At 10:00

AM, we had our first experience of Dharma Mittra Yoga Level I taught by someone from within our teacher training class. The class included members of the outside community who had come to take their regular Monday morning class and the young woman from my teacher training who led the Level I sequence did a wonderful job. I was honored to assist her. It was my first experience assisting when not teaching and I thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to just focus on helping the various students deeper into the postures and their experience of Yoga. After the class was complete, we all assembled and as a group paid compliments and gave constructive criticism to those that had just taught and assisted. It was always insightful to hear the comments of the senior teachers and the teacher training group.

At noon, half the teacher training group had two hours for lunch, while the other half of the class took the noon Master Class led by Andrei Ram. From 2:00-6:00 PM, we were all back together for two classes taught by Michael Gilbert. Michael teaches Yoga at another studio in Manhattan and is a bodyworker of rich experience in a number of modalities. He approaches Yoga from a different place than Sri Dharma Mittra and it was of interest to take in his point of view. The part of the afternoon that we most appreciated was when he had us come forward, one-by-one, and assume a posture that was problematic for us. Michael then worked with us on it, explaining what he was doing to the group as he went. The whole session went a long way toward explaining why there is no perfect posture, only variations that suit different circumstances. One should be capable of various extremes, while always being cognizant of what they're trying to achieve either through their teaching or personal practice.

Our entire group had a half-hour break, then half the group took a 6:30 PM Level III class led by Chandra Om, while the other half of the group observed from the back area of the studio. The class was a great experience for those who took it and it was interesting to observe, as well.

At 8:15 PM, I had the opportunity to teach the Level I Basics class to six students from the greater community, while the rest of the teacher training group headed-out for some rest and relaxation. I had the able assistance of a fellow teacher trainee and Andrei Ram came later to observe what we were up to. I thought I would be nervous, but I actually became calm and connected as soon as I began to teach. Overall, my first experience teaching Dharma Mittra Yoga was a most positive one.

Day Six

The day began at 7:15 AM with chanting, *pranayama* and meditation which segued smoothly into teaching in small groups from 8:00-9:30 AM. At 10:00 AM, my entire teacher training class took a Level I class, taught and assisted by two fellow trainees. I had the unique experience of observing fellow trainees and the effect they had on the class. At 11:30 AM, we all came together to critique the class just taught. At noon, half the group took a Level IV class led by Andrei Ram, while the other half of the class enjoyed a two-hour break for lunch.

From 2:00-3:30 PM, we all took a Partner Yoga workshop with Kyoko Jasper. We spent some of the time doing team-building exercises and the remainder was spent learning how to “fly” one another. Kyoko is a marvelous teacher and we all had a great time engaging in the Yoga of play.

After the Partner Yoga workshop, we had another hour to study The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali with Chandra Om. At 5:30 PM, one third of our group had the chance to experience Marvin Rosenberg’s Gentle Yoga class, while the balance of the group had an hour free for dinner.

We re-convened from 6:30-8:00 PM to take another Level I class led and assisted by fellow trainees. At 8:15 PM, two from the teacher training group taught and assisted a Level II class open to the general public, while the rest of us got to go home for the day.

Day Seven

We began again at 7:15 AM with chanting, *pranayama* and meditation which segued smoothly into teaching in small groups from 8:15-9:30 AM. At 10:00 AM, my entire teacher training group took a Level I class, taught and assisted by two fellow trainees. After the Level I class, we all gathered to critique the teaching and assisting just completed. At noon, half the class took Sri Dharma Mittra’s Level IV class led by Andrei Ram, while the other half of the class enjoyed a two-hour break for lunch.

From 2:00-3:30 PM, we had a session with Chandra Om entitled “Rules and Recommendations of Yoga According to Sri Dharma Mittra” which covered exactly that. From 3:30-5:45 PM, we had a session on Yogic diet with Aundre Chin. Aundre first told us about his strong connection to Sri Dharma and his life before he came to the Dharma Yoga Center. While he told us about a raw, live diet, he also told us about other cleansing techniques such as hydrocolonics which fall outside mainstream Yogic practice. In conclusion, Aundre recommended some excellent recipe books and sang a beautiful Sanskrit chant to his own hand drumming. I have since bought some of the books he recommended and they have been a great help in my own quest to eat a higher percentage of living, raw food each day.

From 6:00-7:30 PM, Aundre Chin led us in a Level III class. Aundre has deep respect for Yoga and that is readily communicated through the manner in which teaches. From 7:30-8:30 PM, we all took “Meditation and Psychic Development” led by Chandra Om. From 8:30-10:00 PM, we had another question and answer session with Chandra Om which began with a brief study of The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali.

Day Eight

The day began at 7:15 AM with chanting, *pranayama* and meditation which segued smoothly into teaching in small groups from 8:15-9:30 AM. At 10:00 AM, my entire teacher training class took a Level I class, taught and assisted by two fellow trainees. After the Level I class, we all gathered to critique the teaching and assisting just completed. At noon, half the group took Sri Dharma Mittra’s Level IV class led by Andrei Ram, while the other half of the class enjoyed a two-hour break for lunch.

From 2:00-5:15 PM, we reunited with Michael Gilbert for an anatomy review. Michael used *asana* at each stage of the lecture to demonstrate different ways in which physics govern our bodies' behavior under various conditions.

At 5:30 PM, one third of our group had the chance to experience Marvin Rosenberg's Gentle Yoga class, while the balance of the group had an hour free for dinner. I was of the third that got to take class with Marvin that day and I experienced Yoga in a whole new way under his careful guidance. Marvin is a thoughtful teacher and I very much appreciated the manner in which he taught.

We re-convened from 6:30-8:00 PM to take another Level I class led and assisted by fellow trainees. From 8:30-10:00 PM, members of Krishna Das' KD Posse were at the Center to lead the chanting of eleven rounds of "The Hanuman Chalisa". This *kirtan* event was optional and only one other trainee and myself attempted to hold out until ten. We were so glad that we did! Each melody was more beautiful than the last and I couldn't get over how expertly the various members of the KD Posse played their instruments and sang. I had never encountered "The Hanuman Chalisa" before and was moved by its words and composition.

Day Nine

After days filled with lectures, postures and deep discussions, we were primed to slip easily into meditation/ absorption. Sri Dharma led the 7:15-8:00 AM session of chanting, *pranayama* and meditation and I remember it as being of particular power and depth. From 8:00-9:30 AM, we had a practicum on the components and focus of the Dharma Mitra Yoga Level II sequence led by Sri Dharma and some of the senior teachers in his lineage. From 10:00-11:30 AM, we all took a Level I class taught and assisted by two of our peers and observed by Sri Dharma. The half-hour critique that followed was enhanced as Sri Dharma and Ismrittee Devi Om shared their feedback with the group-at-large.

At noon, we all took the Level IV class led by Sri Dharma Mitra and assisted by some of the senior teachers. It was a delight to revisit this sequence with Sri Dharma and to show him what we'd learned over the course of the past few days. At two o'clock, we met Shiva Prasad, an old-friend of Sri Dharma's and fellow disciple of Yogi Gupta. They had both been residents of Yogi Gupta's Manhattan Ashram in the late sixties and early seventies. Shiva was in New York because Yogi Gupta had come over from India and Shiva was to have an audience with him over the weekend. The time that we spent with Shiva Prasad was very special. Although the topic of that first lecture was "Classical Concepts of Yoga", he also told us a bit about his own life and it was of great interest to hear about his and Sri Dharma's time with Yogi Gupta.

We were with Shiva Prasad until 4:45 PM and then we had *satsang* with Sri Dharma Mitra for about an hour. I remember that evening as being both intimate and special. From 6:00-7:30 PM, I had the honor of teaching Sri Dharma's Level II class with Sri Dharma in attendance. Andrei Ram had told me that to teach with Sri Dharma present is

empowering and a good thing, but I felt rather nervous at the start. Sri Dharma was out of his chair as soon as we began the first round of his *Shiva Namaskar Vinyasa*, giving the various students assists and occasionally correcting me. As the time passed, I found my way back to the calm I'd felt when teaching on Monday evening and in my small group. Eventually, everything flowed and I think it all came out just fine.

From 7:30-8:30 PM, we all took an amazing class in "Purification and Psychic Development" with Sri Dharma Mittra. Afterwards, we had a review session with Chandra Om to prepare us for the final exam to be given the following morning. The review session ended-up covering much of the material that appeared on the actual exam and it was incredible to realize how much we'd absorbed over the past nine days. We all left around 10:00 PM and I spent a good part of the night reading through my notes and memorizing that which I thought I would need to have ready for instant recall the next morning.

Day Ten

Our day began with a last beautiful session of chanting, *prananyama* and meditation led by Sri Dharma Mittra. The day formally began at the Center at 9:15 AM, which gave many of us some time in the morning to cram some last morsels of precious knowledge into our now very full heads. We had an hour-and-forty-five minutes to take the exam which began at 10:00 AM, but many of us were finished before then. Although the exam covered almost everything we'd studied during the course of the training, we didn't have to answer every question. This allowed each of us to focus on the areas we knew best and just dip into the ones you didn't. Half the group took a Level III class with Bernadette Dhutu from noon until 1:30 PM, while the other half of the group had a break for lunch.

From 1:30-3:00 PM, there was a final Level I class, taught and assisted from within our teacher training group. Afterward, we all gathered with Sri Dharma Mittra, Ismrittee Devi Om and Shiva Prasad for a final session on psychic anatomy and the *chakras*. We learned right out until 5:00 PM when our training ended with a last vegetarian potluck feast, many hugs and a few tears. Some of us headed straight-out for airports and departing flights, while others went home to bed. A few stayed to take part in an open house for future teacher trainings to inspire others to come and be a part of future "Life of a Yogi" Teacher Trainings offered through the Dharma Yoga Center.

Conclusion

Reading back over my notes and looking at the schedule from those ten days in February, I am struck again by the generosity of all the people involved with the organization and execution of this teacher training that I was so fortunate to have been a part of. The handbook which you are given is in itself worth the tuition, as the received knowledge and accumulated wisdom of ages is contained there. The secrets of Yoga were traditionally whispered in small increments over a vast expanse of time. With Sri Dharma Mittra and his senior teachers, you are given everything and all at once. It is so inspiring to have the chance to delve into the wisdom of Yoga with someone who has

devoted his life to it for over half a century. To have ten days of constant exposure to all of this is truly the opportunity of a lifetime.

Since completing my training, I have taught, assisted and subbed weekly at the Dharma Yoga Center and feel fortunate to be able to share what I now know with other seekers. I continue to attend class at least twice a week and my own practice continues to deepen under the compassionate guidance of Sri Dharma Mittra and his senior teachers. Taking this 200-hour teacher training was one the great experiences of my life to date and I feel sure that the impact of those ten days in February will affect my life for all the years that I have left to live.