



Dharma Yoga Comes to Berlin

For YogaService.de Berlin

Sri Yogi Dharma Mittra the legendary “Teachers’ Teacher” and “Asana Master” is the founder and director of Dharma Yoga Center New York. He has been actively disseminating the sacred science of Yoga since 1967. His practice and steady application of his beloved Guru’s teachings form the backbone of his approach to a lineage seeped in classical tradition. Sri Dharma Mittra has shared these living practices with hundreds of thousands of Yoga seekers, Yoga teachers, and devotees the world over. His Life of a Yogi Teacher Training Immersions has been a supportive platform for the dissemination of Dharma Yoga into the lives of many of today’s new teachers. Sri Yogi Dharma today, at 71, is as active as ever teaching, guiding and inspiring daily at his school on 23rd Street and 3rd Avenue in New York City, and through workshops and Teacher Training Immersions the world over. Countless people have been inspired and learned from him over the years through his famous Master Chart of 908 Postures, his book, “ASANAS 608 Yoga Poses” or his much acclaimed DVD titles: “Maha Sadhana Levels I and II.” For more information on Sri Dharma’s life and work, go to www.dharmayogacenter.com.

"With constant practice, one can improve his physical body and mental attitude rapidly, thereby igniting the higher motives of making ones self useful to himself and all mankind." Dharma Mittra

What kind of Yoga do you practice and teach?

I have been teaching many aspects of Yoga everyday for the past 45 years. “Be receptive” is my motto, and in order to make the asana practice complete and whole one must learn to offer every action to the Supreme Self or God. These are the teachings imbedded in Dharma Yoga, the name coined by Ismrittee Devi. Every Dharma Yoga class is complete in the main practices needed for a healthy body and healthy mind. Yoga is the settling of the mind into silence, and only a calm mind will be able to find uninterrupted concentration or meditation. The postures, the breathing exercises, and deep relaxation as taught in every class, all offer guidance in the practice of concentration



without interruption. A main teaching in Dharma Yoga is the importance of being firmly established in the Ethical Rules. Within the Yamas, *Ahimsa* or non-violence is the starting place to learn and practice compassion for all beings, and therein it is the foundation for all that is Yoga. I also teach from scriptures such as the *Bhagavad-Gita* and *Yoga Sutras*, and chant mantras in order to cultivate devotion. My own practice began with Karma Yoga or selfless service, doing everything that needed to be done for my Guru. I am a selfless servant who is here only to share and serve what I know to others, so they can find their true self, and ultimately peace of mind. I hope you understand as that is Dharma Yoga in a nutshell.

Describing Yoga and *Asana*, you are quoted as saying: “It’s not necessary to be flexible to practice Yoga. The most important posture is the Headstand, and it requires no flexibility at all.” How does this relate to the 908 poses captured on your famous poster?

What Yoga really is, is not all the advanced difficult poses like being able to put your feet behind your head, but learning to see yourself in everyone and offering up the fruit of every action to the Lord. I always mention in classes that the *Asana* practice is really a preparation for truly practicing Yoga. It is something that makes the body healthy and strong so we can develop the fortitude to sit and concentrate without interruption in order to discover who we really are. I have devoted every day of my life for the past 50 years to *Asana* practice. For me *Asana* is more than physical exercise, in that every pose represents a state of consciousness, and in assuming a complete pose, we have a chance to experience something we have never experienced before. This has an effect on the mind and one can even come to taste meditation right there in the physical practice. When the thought arrived in my mind to create the Master Yoga Chart of 908 Postures, I wanted it to be first and foremost an offering to my Guru as well as to inspire people into Yoga *Asana* practice. I organized it in a fashion that all the posture variations I knew or created were lined up together so they can be practiced in succession according to ability. If you look to see *Halasana*, the shoulder stand, you will see so many variations to practice. In regards to *Sirshasana*, the headstand, it is a more advanced posture, but can be mastered quite easily with correct direction. And yes it is true as I say; it does not demand flexibility. But it does require control and steadiness, and that is often an attribute that needs lots of practice. I still love practicing *Asana* and manifesting (creating) postures that are both beautiful, challenging, and create a special state of consciousness to advance a person’s love and devotion. I am happy to see so many postures from the Master Yoga Chart and that I am doing in classes today on the covers of magazines everywhere, and in the vocabulary of the young students of today. Most do not know where they came from, as many I named after saints. I see all postures as pure devotion, void of ego, just as love of God.



You continue to teach class almost every day of the week, have done so for many years, and still always take the time to answer questions at the conclusion of your classes both in New York and abroad. Have the questions and your answers changed over the years?

It is my highest desire to help all aspirants make spiritual progress in this lifetime. Yoga teachings are so necessary in this period of time, when un-truths can be spread quickly to the public through all mass media forums. I continue to teach daily as I always have, helping practitioners from all walks of life, householders, office workers, dancers and gymnasts achieve physical prowess in asana practice. But my heart felt life mission is to give all the tools and understanding to know that Yoga is a divinely efficient set of techniques devoted to Self-realization that requires nothing, no mats, no props, no expensive clothes or costumes, just the body itself. Realized by the saints and sages of earlier times, I like to say “Yoga is a shortcut to immortality.” It is not a religion, but a science that if practiced correctly, will bring to the Sadhaka (practitioner) radiant health, and mental and psychic powers within a short time. These may then be used to achieve Self-realization, the goal of all life.

To be a good student, one must be reverent, have patience and make great efforts. I think maybe there is a little less reverence today and perhaps more interest in the physical aspects of the practice, but the questions are still the same, as people yearning to discover who and what they really are remains eternal. I try to be receptive to what the students ask and to what I think will help them to make progress based on my intuition and experience. I think it’s good sometimes to just do your meditation and keep asking the question. Then, all the answers come.

How important are the *Yamas* and *Niyamas* for a Yogi?

Yama and *Niyama* are the foundation of Yoga. Without them, there is no Yoga. To succeed in all aspects of life, much concentration is required. Increased ability to concentrate is a direct consequence of regular Sadhana (spiritual practice) in the Eight Limbs of Yoga, which then may be applied to discover answers to essential questions such as, “Who am I? What is beyond the mind? What is the cause of all pain and suffering? What is the greatest of all impurities?” and “How can I be free from pain and suffering?”

The Classical Yoga System known as Astanga Yoga is divided into eight limbs or stages through which the body and mind are prepared, purified, and then surmounted. They are as follows:



Yama (The Ethical Rules)

Niyama (The Observances)

Asana (Postures; the Exercises)

Pranayama (Control of the Vital Life-Force)

Pratyahara (Control of the Senses)

Dharana (Concentration)

Dhyana (Concentration without Interruption; Meditation)

Samadhi (Absorption with the Object or Subject of Contemplation; Bliss-Absolute)

Yama and **Niyama** are the foundation which lead one to success in meditation. Constant application of **Yama** and **Niyama** develops in the Sadhaka tools for healthy living and thinking. Ahimsa brings one compassion for all living being and creatures and therefore a clean vegetarian diet. **Asana** (posture) practice, combined with Bandhas (locks), Mudras (seals) and Kriyas (cleansing-techniques), brings radiant health and long life. A healthy body leads to a healthy mind, and only a mind which is calm and steady can achieve unbroken concentration (meditation). **Pranayama** (breath control practices) will purify the nerves, calm the mind and, consequently, allow the Sadhaka to take control of Prana (vital life-force) and the mind. With passion and emotions under control, success in meditation is surely in sight. **Pratyahara** is the ability to control the senses. **Dharana** is one of the results of Pranayama practice as concentration is heightened when the senses are controlled. With the practice of the previous steps, **Dhyana** (meditation) is easy to attain. Last is **Samadhi**, when the practitioner becomes completely absorbed in the object or subject of contemplation as the self rests and is completely absorbed in divine perception.

You have a dictum on your website which says: “Reduce your wants and lead a happy and contented life.” How can we learn to balance our wants in an urban environment?

For years I have always told my students that New York City is the best place to practice Yoga. I have had Dharma Yoga Centers in the noisiest of locales. If you live in a cave deep in the Himalayas, there may be few or no distractions, but you are not tested either. To practice *Brahmacharya* (celibacy) when there is no one else around it is not so hard, or to fast when you have nothing to eat. Or if you live in India often there is no means to make money, no work for millions, so becoming a Yogi may be necessary even. The temptations are very strong here in New York City. One has to try very hard to avoid eating pizza in New York where there is a pizzeria on every street corner and the smell of the fresh pies follows you almost to the next shop. Balance is not easy to achieve under



even the best of conditions, but one must make great efforts and renounce, renounce, renounce. If one can do that when constantly challenged, they are truly practicing Yoga.

What is the purpose of Yoga?

Well, as I mentioned before, Yoga is a shortcut to immortality. It is not a religion, but a science that if practiced correctly, will bring to the student radiant health, and mental and psychic powers within a short time. These may then be used to achieve Self-realization, the goal of all life. According to the *Bhagavad-Gita*, at the moment of creation, a portion of God became part of every living being; dwelling in the heart as the Real You. We each have this same Divine Light -- the same hundred watt bulb, but for many this bulb is covered in layers of soot and grime and maybe only a couple watts shine through. Yoga is a system of ancient time tested and beautiful techniques designed to help us purify ourselves and calm our mind until the light can manifest full-force in us and we can see it clearly as the Supreme Self or God, the same as in everyone else. This takes time, of course, and it is great to have the help of someone in whom God already manifests a little more through than you. Don't eat the flesh of animals, be kind to everyone, do your practice every day, renounce the fruit of all actions to the Almighty One and observe the fullness of *Yama* and *Niyama*. Of this my friends, I call Yoga. By doing these things, one will surely discover the purpose of Yoga. Much love to all, Om Shanti, Shanti, Shantih
Dharma Mitra

