

# FROM THE 1960S TO 2011 Sri Dharma Mittra Brings Yoga to Life



***In the 1960's when you became a full-time Yogi, many fewer people were doing Yoga than today. Do you feel that people gravitate to Yoga practice for different reasons in 2010? If so, what are the differences based on?***

SRI DHARMA MITTRA: A half century ago, Yoga was still traditionally taught and received. At that time, the students were mostly interested in enlightenment and Self-realization, and the Gurus and teachers were few, but were endowed with Divine qualities. Additionally, some were endowed with Self-knowledge and had achieved Self-realization. Most of the students were both reverent and obedient in dealing with their teachers. Thus, they were guided to God-realization.

Today, students' needs are different and more complex. Due to technology and countless distractions such as: drugs, junk food, computers and movies, the Yoga students are mostly seeking relief from their pain and suffering caused by lots of indulgences. They are seeking Yoga for good health, mental powers and, of course, some peace of mind. Very few are after total liberation or Self-realization. The Asanas multiply greatly in numbers. The teachers are by the hundreds of thousands or so, and there are all kinds of teachers. Some concentrate

just on Hatha, and some teach without Yama and Niyama — the ethical rules and observances of Yoga. Others are making a business of Yoga and, of course, there are still some endowed with liberation or Self-realization, but they are hidden to those who are not yet ready. Yoga is taught in many ways to fit the many needs of today.

Also, today there are many different kinds of students. The feeble student who criticizes the teacher and displays no good conduct, the decent, average student and the Divine one who is endowed with reverence, obedience and a strong desire for liberation. This is why there are many kinds of teachers — to fit everyone.

***People usually imagine a Yogi as a person detached from society and completely immersed in his or her practice. Is it possible to combine regular, everyday life and deep Yoga practice?***

DHARMA: There are many Yogis, (and these days anyone who studies Yoga can be called a Yogi) who decide to apply most of their time to Yoga and renounce most of their worldly desires in order to quickly reach enlightenment. Living alone and dedicated to the welfare of all mankind, they soon enjoy endless Bliss (just one small experience of the Almighty One). These are older souls who are born already with Divine qualities such as: discipline in mind, a heart full of love, and with one thing only in their mind: to merge in the Almighty One.

For those who are engaged with family, business and the world (householders), surely they too can reach enlightenment in this very lifetime. The difference is that they will have to pass through even more temptations and distractions, but, in the end, this will serve to make these Yogis strong and powerful.

Be compassionate to all, treat your guest and pets well, and be engaged in constant Yoga practice — this is the secret of success. Remember, renounce the fruit of every action to the Supreme One — this then is even better than meditation.

***When do the physical exercises on the mat become Yoga Asana? What does this depend on?***

DHARMA: The physical exercises become Asana when the body becomes steady and comfortable in the posture, and when the Asana assumes a specific geometric form



(the form is very important, because it will induce in the practitioner a state of consciousness if it is held long enough). Also, there should be a point for concentration (a Drishti), and a specific way to breathe while in each posture.

Due to the pose's physical demands, the physical body is greatly benefited. Glands, organs and muscles may be stimulated or toned, and, in some cases, mental powers are awakened. Thus, the exercise on the mat is turned into Yoga Asana.

***What does the term "Yoga" mean to you?***

DHARMA: Yoga means: after the settling of the mind into silence through the practice of Yogic techniques such as keeping Yama and Niyama, being always extremely compassionate to all, through total surrender of the ego, being endowed with Self-knowledge, engaging in lots of reflection and finally resting the mind on Brahman, the Almighty One, for a long time, the individual soul becomes one with the Universal Soul. This Union is Yoga. All the techniques are just preparations.

***Yoga is one of the great gifts bestowed on the West by the East. Can a person from the West understand the essence of Yoga and practice Yoga as part of life there?***

DHARMA: I think that the difficulties that

Yogis in the West face arise mainly during the Asana practice. In general, the legs of those from India or the Far East can easily find Lotus Pose, because Indians and those from the Far East rarely use chairs and spend much of their time in a squatting pose instead. Also, in India and much of developing world, they are less exposed to junk food and have less attachment to comfort and the distractions that we have in the West due to our technology.

I think that here in the USA is the best place on the planet for the practice of Yoga. Without much effort, everything that's needed is right at our fingertips. Some best teachers on the planet are here (most of the Gurus are right here in the USA), there is abundant healthy food, there are Yoga schools everywhere, through the Internet, most of the scriptures can be delivered overnight to our door and some can even afford to hire a teacher for one on one private instruction. All

the distractions and temptations in our way are really a challenge for us, and, in conquering them all, we have the chance to put our discipline to the test. Isn't that a blessing?

***What about the disciple – what should his or her qualities be? What is the difference between a disciple and a student?***

DHARMA: When the student possesses all the qualities required to become a disciple, the teacher then accepts him or her as a part of his or her spiritual family and a spiritual name and personal spiritual Mantra are given. The teacher will give guidance until the disciple achieves the goal of life: Self-realization. The disciple must be obedient and help the teacher when needed. Thus, disciple and teacher are connected forever.

The regular student is not born spiritually yet, not tested by the teacher and not asked to be initiated, so, one must be qualified to be accepted as a disciple.

***What do you teach future Yoga teachers?***

DHARMA: Through our "Life of a Yogi" Teacher Training immersions and through our regular courses, future teachers always receive thorough instruction in Yama and Niyama – the ethical rules and observances of Yoga. They are encouraged to develop supreme compassion and reverence for all beings. Armed with these

two, all that is left is to surrender to the Almighty One. Teachers are also taught to give up their ego and to devote lots of time to trying to understand the meaning of the Yoga Sutras, the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, the Bhagavad-Gita and especially Self-Knowledge by Swami Sivananda. They are taught how to stay clean physically, mentally and spiritually (Divine purification). Finally, they are taught to use the Yogic techniques for one purpose only: to ready themselves and those they teach for enlightenment.

At present, there are many Yoga schools and many Yoga teachers. How would you describe your way of practice and teaching? What is different at the Dharma Yoga Centers from other Yoga schools?

Only knowledge can stop pain and suffering, and this is what I concentrate on with all my heart. Supreme Knowledge as in: "What is the cause of all pain and suffering?"; "What is the greatest impurity?"; "What is eternal?"; "How does one control the mind?"; "What is the nature of the five bodies concealing the Supreme Self?"; and "How can one reach the state of eternal Bliss?" The foundation of our teaching here is Yama and Niyama. Our teachers live according to Yama and Niyama; they are vegetarians, and are kind and compassionate to all.

**From reviewing the weekly schedules at your Dharma Yoga New York Centers, I can see that Kirtan is a regular offering. Why?**

DHARMA: To wash impure thoughts from the intellect, the waters of devotion are used. Powerful Mantras in the form of songs are to be sung with the deepest devotion. It's the easiest way to trigger Divine attention and experience exceeding spiritual bliss. This manner of practice is an esoteric practice in its own right — Bhakti Yoga. Eventually, everyone passes through it. Of course, there is a time when we have to go beyond the emotions in order to settle the mind into silence. Thus, the mind becomes fit to have a vision of the Almighty One.

Kirtan is indeed a great practice; it satisfies those who have devotional tendencies. That's why it's important to have it in our Centers, because the students must be encouraged to follow their dharmas (tendencies). My Guru always suggested to us (his students) to practice a little bit of each type of Yoga, and then to concentrate more on the one that fits to our dharma. Thus, it will speed and aid spiritual progress.

**Anything else you would like to share with our readers?**

DHARMA: The greatest type of charity is sharing or promoting spiritual knowledge to others in need. This supreme knowledge stays with us until our enlightenment, and it can't be taken from us -- it's really a treasure. A magazine helping to disseminate Yoga indeed has Divine qualities, because it's doing the highest type of charity — bringing to thousands of people important knowledge — information that will lead them to the right path, thus relieving their pain and suffering. I thank this publication for giving me this great opportunity to answer the Divine questions above -- it was really a pleasure for me.

Regarding all of you reading these words right now, my wish for you all is for you to be engaged in constant practice -- this is the secret of making progress. Meditate on compassion, stay vegan and seek enlightenment. Be obedient to your teacher and reverent to all. Oh my loved ones, keep Yama and Niyama! Then, you have a short cut to Immortality. Lastly, I love you all. I am you and you are me.

Lots of Love dearest ones, and Remember — the goal is Self Realization!

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Legendary Teachers' Teacher and Yoga Master, Sri Dharma Mittra first encountered Yoga as a teenager before meeting his Guru in 1964 and beginning his training in earnest. Sri Dharma founded one of the early independent schools of Yoga in New York City in 1975, and has taught hundreds of thousands the world over in the years since. Sri Dharma is the model and creator of the "Master Yoga Chart of 908 Postures", the author of *Asanas: 608 Yoga Poses*, has released two DVD's to date – "Maha Sadhana" Levels I & II, and the Yoga Journal book *Yoga*, was based on his famous Master Chart. Sri Dharma continues to disseminate the complete traditional science of Yoga through daily classes, workshops and his "Life of a Yogi" Teacher Trainings, both at his Centers in New York, and around the world. For more information on all things Dharma, please visit [www.dharmayogacenter.com](http://www.dharmayogacenter.com). Visit our new Dharma West Temple at 61 West 23rd St. in Manhattan, where you can still find Sri Dharma conducting programs each day 12-2pm and 6:30pm.

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