

# Ask the Master Teacher

with Sri Yogi Dharma Mittra



**H**ow did you discover Yoga?

I was interested in and curious about spiritual things from a young age, but was not satisfied by the answers provided by the faith I was born into. I first encountered the esoteric knowledge of Yoga in books and immediately felt that “this was it.” When I was serving in the military as a young man, I sustained

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lost in constant remembrance, Om Shanti Om.

– Sri Yogi Dharma Mittra

a great injury during maneuvers and was laid-up in the hospital for months. I spent much of this time practicing Deep Relaxation of the sort commonly practiced in Corpse Pose at the conclusion of most Asana classes. This was my introduction to formal practice. A few years later, my brother came to New York and met Swami Kailashananda, known to his American followers as "Yogi Gupta". My brother wrote me and said that he had met the Guru. I sold everything I owned including my business, bought a one-way plane ticket to New York and, the day I arrived in New York, met Yogi Gupta for myself. My main practice became Karma Yoga and I worked a number of jobs so that I could afford to take every class Yogi Gupta taught whenever he came over from India. I tried to always copy the teacher both physically and mentally and devoted every available moment to practicing everything I was learning from him. In doing so, I discovered Yoga.

**I am a high stress individual and am looking to Yoga for stress relief. Can Yoga help?**

One of the great benefits to practice in general is that it brings one to a place where rather than routinely engaging the sympathetic nervous system, one learns to regularly engage the para-sympathetic nervous system. This is to say that for most over-programmed, over-worked, under rested and poorly nourished individuals, a great deal of life is spent in "fight or flight" mode. All the beautiful techniques of Yoga exist to quiet the mind and create a state of radiant health in the body so that we can discover who and what we really are. There is a type of Yoga and a teacher which is ideal for each individual so follow your intuition and try some of the classes offered locally until you find the approach and teacher that best suits you. Possessing the desire to change means that you are already on your way to discover how much more there is to understand and experience of life as the mind begins to settle a little through the practice of Yoga.

**I have heard that you say that "the secret is constant practice", but find doing anything consistently difficult. What has kept you "on the path" for over forty-five years?**

Most things in life that are truly worthwhile demand dedication. Yoga is perhaps the most worthwhile endeavor any of us will ever engage in and it only has an effect if it's done regularly. Take the Lotus Pose for example. There are individuals for whom this pose is easy, but for most in the West, this pose takes some time and effort to achieve. Once

achieved, if one doesn't practice it regularly, they will lose it. It is certainly this way for many of the advanced postures. When I was photographing myself for the poster of 908 Asanas I dedicated to my Guru, there were some postures I only had for a short period of time during this process. I took the picture and never did them again! The main postures however I continue to do to maintain the physical health of the body and so that I can inspire the students occasionally with a little demonstration. There are enough different techniques in the Yogic arsenal that every individual can find those that appeal to their nature and temperament. Find those that work for you and do them every day with faith. Remember also that you do the work because it has to be done. Some things in life and Yoga are not too pleasant, but you must do them just the same. This was what worked for me. Over time, the consistency will become routine.

**I feel sometimes as though every time I take a Yoga class, I am learning new Postures and when I try to practice at home, I am unsure as to which I should do. I definitely don't have the time or ability to do all 908 on your famous Master Yoga Chart. Which should I be sure to include?**

The main poses are the Headstand, Shoulderstand, Fish, Forward Bend, Back-Bend and the Spinal-Twist. It's good to do seven rounds of Sun Salutations to warm-up then you can go right to Headstand, the King of Poses, and stay there for a long time. When you've completed your Headstand, rest a little with your head down, then move on to the Queen of Asanas, the Shoulderstand, and so on. Most people are eager to move and do, but if you have the patience and discipline to stick with the main postures and rest in them without pain or strain for a long time, you may begin to taste a little meditation right there in the Asana practice. The chances of this happening are far greater if one performs the main poses with the eyes closed and focuses the attention at the space between the eyebrows. Doing this stimulates the Pituitary gland, the master gland that Yogis believe to be the "Sixth-Sense". This action eventually leads to Divine intuition.

**Doing the breathing exercises makes me feel calmer, but I am not sure why or whether I should perform them regularly.**

Pranayama or "breath-control" is a very powerful aspect of practice as it is the aspect during which we directly control the move-

ment of Prana, the vital life-force. Prana gives the magnet its magnetic ability and is the force which causes the celestial bodies to spin on their axis. The main breathing is the Alternate-Nostril Breathing and one should be sure to do at least ten minutes of this breathing every day. The effects of this breathing are greatly increased when one combines them with breath-retention and locks. Yoga is the settling of the mind into silence and the regular, steady practice of Pranayama can take us a long way towards quieting the mind.

**I am new to Yoga, lead a very busy life and getting to a class even once a week can be a challenge for me. Is there some aspect of practice I can work into my already hectic schedule on a daily basis?**

It's best to start at the beginning which in Yoga is the Ethical Rules. The first of these is Ahimsa or "non-violence". Every other aspect of practice rests upon and is an out-growth of this one, fundamental principle. The restraint or "Yama" of Ahimsa should inform every thought, word and deed of one who practices Yoga and this is a practice that one can engage in any time, anywhere. Consider the food you eat as most people eat at least three times a day. Does your diet include meat, fish or poultry? If so, you are actively participating in violence. You may not have slaughtered the pig, cow or chicken or caught the fish yourself, but in spending your money at the grocery store for these items, you are supporting a process that resulted in a short life of pain and suffering which ended in murder. Think of your pets, your dog or cat who is truly a member of your family. Would you ever think of killing him or her and then eating them? Remove yourself from this cycle of violence, eat as many fresh fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds as you can and enjoy radiant, good health as an added bonus. Observing Ahimsa in this way every day will help you develop compassion, a crucial quality for one who aspires to Yoga. Be kind to everyone and practice Ahimsa. Then every other aspect of practice will come to you.

**At the end of class, my teacher sometimes tells us to close our eyes and "meditate". I have looked around the room and seen everyone else sitting quietly with their eyes closed, but I have no idea what to do. Any suggestions?**

Well, first you must learn to concentrate. One unit of concentration is defined in Yogic terms as holding only one thought in the mind for about twelve seconds. If you can train the

mind to do this, eventually you can sustain concentration for about two or three minutes without interruption, a complete unit of meditation. The key is to find an object, image or sound which the mind is attracted to. For instance, someone who is very devoted to the Lord Buddha might sit and stare at a full-body portrait of the Buddha, memorizing every detail of the image. After a few minutes, let the eyes close and leave them closed until the image fades. As soon as it does, open the eyes again for a few seconds and re-capture the image. Then, close the eyes again, repeating this process over and over for the length of time you have available to practice. Engaging in this process on a regular basis will have the effect of training the mind to hold the image without interruption for a long time until everything else recedes and disappears. Be patient, diligent and find an object that works for you.

With my sincere wishes and devout prayers that you will become lost in constant remembrance, Om Shanti Om. Sri Yogi Dharma Mittra

*Dharma Yoga is based on the continuous teachings of Sri Dharma Mittra, founder of Dharma Yoga Center on 23rd St. since 1975, where he continues to teach daily. He is the creator of over 300 popular Yoga postures, and is known as the "Teacher's Teacher" and "The Rock of Yoga". Dharma Mittra is the author of Asanas: 608 Yoga Pose, Master Yoga Chart of 908 Postures, Everything I have is Yours, Dharma Mittra A Friend to All. and popular and informative "Maha Sadhana" DVD series. Visit [www.dharmayogacenter.com](http://www.dharmayogacenter.com) for more information.*

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