

ॐ DHARMA MITTRA YOGA ॐ

NEW YORK CENTER



MAY 16, 2009, NEW YORK CITY – Saturday evening, early Spring: a line snakes around the St. George Ballroom on East 27th Street. Hundreds of people hang on to rolled up yoga mats like so many pieces of giant candy, waiting patiently for the doors to open so they can be led by the esteemed Dharma Mittra in an hour long class and celebrate their master's 70th birthday.

Once the room was filled, there was not an inch between the yoga mats placed with precision on the floor, balloons garlanded the ornate columns, flowers, and candles lit the stage. It was festive, celebratory and because it's NYC, a fair balance between the modest, sublime yogi and the outrageous, look-at-me few who chose to practice acrobatic couples yoga next to the food line and pose all the while looking, looking to see who was looking. I have no idea why...



Wife, Eva Mittra, and her crew quietly and expertly orchestrated last week's event with an obvious love and outright adoration. The vegetarian food at the festive dinner was wonderful, a mix between Middle Eastern and Indian and unfortunately – there was not enough of it. Beautiful yogis were in a huff. Eva Mittra was apologetic but undaunted. What could she do? There were so many people.

Dharma Mittra led the class with humor and grace. He advised those trying to get their foot behind their head to "leave it there for a couple of weeks" and for those students more capable in advanced poses he thought it would be a good idea to just go for it and "not waste your time." He was especially charming when making reference to "skydiveasana," in which students should extend their arms and legs at right angles in a variation of salambasana (Locust Pose).



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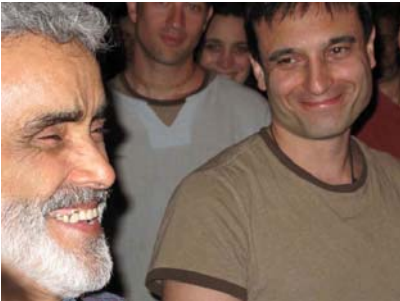
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Three of his accolades performed an asana dance to honor him. It was impressive but also felt a bit forced. The rehearsal, practiced in a dark corner of the room while everyone dined, was fluid and relaxed – a delight to watch. The women – each physically different from the other and with varying capabilities – truly embodied the essence of each asana. Akarnadhanurasana (shooting bow pose) was performed in triplicate and with unbelievable grace. There were wardrobe malfunctions, however, during the full performance, and a palpable anxiety... I'm sure I was not the only one who wondered – would that top actually come off? (It didn't.)

Happy Birthday was sung by all, and then followed up with *La Bamba* (a special request by the guest of honor himself). Dharma Mittra did a little jig and grinned. For most of the evening, his countenance was still, unsullied by emotion, but when he smiled he radiated and it was impossible not to feel the joy emanating from him. He spoke briefly about everyone's ability to find enlightenment in this lifetime. Simply saying it was possible and he wished it for every person.



Krishna Das was joined by Wah! in completing the festivities with a Kirtan that went on for hours. Unfortunately, yours truly was at a certain point during the singing scolded by a large man representing "Dharma's camp" for taking "too many pictures... That's enough, don't you think? *You* decide."

Ah, New York City yoga — speak softly and carry a big mat. It was nearing midnight and time to leave anyway. My battery was empty.

— Gina de la Chesnaye



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