

the yj interview

by Diane Anderson



Poster Boy

Like his pose chart, Dharma Mittra still inspires yogis around the world.

IN 1984, BEFORE PHOTOSHOP magic, former bodybuilder Dharma Mittra created his classic “Master Yoga Chart of 908 Postures.” Today the 68-year-old continues to

inspire yogis worldwide with his challenging sequences, compassionate charm, winning humility, and message of devotion. In class, he leads a vigorous workout while encouraging students to make each move “an offering to God.”

How did you find yoga? I was raised in Brazil. My parents were Catholic, but my family also had spiritual seekers. I was in the Brazilian air force for seven years. I studied yoga books in the '50s. My brother, Sattya Mittra, two years younger than me, came to the States in '62 and met Sri Swami Kailashananda, or Yogi Gupta. In 1964, I quit the air force, came to New York, and met Yogi Gupta. I didn't speak one word of English, so my brother translated. In 1966, Yogi Gupta initiated me as a *sannyasin* [renunciate]. My name had been

Carlos but was changed to Dharma [“friend of good works”], and I moved into his ashram.

How was your famous poster born? In 1975, I left Yogi Gupta and founded Yoga Asana Dharma Yoga Center. In 1984, I took pictures of myself in poses using a Nikon and a remote control. In some postures, I had to click the remote with my mouth and spit it out seconds before the flash went off! I took the photos to be printed on a poster, 43 inches by five feet. I sold them for 10 cents each. Now the poster has been in New Zealand, Russia, India, all over. I knew it would be something, someday.

You're vegetarian? Yes! My father raised pigs. Pigs have feelings. I watched them kill 50 pigs one day. From then on, I couldn't touch meat. It's stained with pain and suffering. “Thou shalt not kill” applies to more than just humans. *Ahimsa*, the principle of nonharming, applies to all beings—in thought, word, and action. All beings love life and tremble at danger. If you open a cupboard, roaches run like hell, don't they? They want to have children, too. We have to see divinity everywhere to get closer to *samadhi* [self-realization].

Besides vegetarianism and asana, what's important in your teaching? Through meditation, you purify yourself. Keep the *yamas* [restraints] and *niyamas* [observances] and surrender to the lord who resides in the right side of your heart. Without divine help, you go nowhere. Live the golden rule. Purify your heart. Lose the ego. The greatest impurity, the most negative energy, is ignorance. You must accept nonduality and God consciousness. If you devote all your actions to the Lord, he'll show you bliss.

What's your family life like? I have a son, 17, and daughter, 16. But I haven't seen my brother, whom I love so much, in two decades. He gave me his number 20 years ago saying, “If you experience any difficulties, you can call.” My mother died two years later, so I called, but the number wasn't working. I don't know where he is, but I'll see him again. In reincarnation, old age, or death. Whatever happens is our own deeds. I am fortunate that I encountered karma and reincarnation. Maybe I'll be reborn as a pig. ■

PHOTO: CHERYL UNGAR; HAIR/MAKEUP: AMY SOLOMON/MAXIMUM TALENT; SHOT AT THE LULA W. DORSEY MUSEUM, YMCA OF THE ROCKIES