

## the yj interview

by Diane Anderson

# Bold Soul

**Rod Stryker's deep study of Tantra has taught him to be fearless and joyful.**

**PARAYOGA FOUNDER** Rod Stryker blazed Tantric trails in the Los Angeles yoga scene of the '80s and '90s. He now lives with his wife, Gina, and twin sons, Jaden and Theo, in Colorado, where he plans to open a retreat center. With an upcoming book, *The Four Desires* (Bantam), he continues to teach internationally and study with Pandit Rajmani Tigunait, head of the Himalayan Institute.

**When did you discover yoga?** In this lifetime, when I was five. I picked up a book that featured hundreds of postures; I was impressed with the self-mastery. I remember thinking that one day I would do that. I didn't practice until I was 19—I was taken by the introduction of [B.K.S. Iyengar's] *Light on Yoga* and began practicing by myself. I'm a zealot, so I'd hold Shoulderstand for 20 minutes. I had out-of-body experiences. This was 1979. A lot of things have come and gone in my life. Yoga has always stayed with me.

**Who were your teachers?** I practiced Kundalini for a couple of years. In 1980, I met Alan Finger and his dad, Mani. I practiced Tantric hatha yoga and never left that approach. Initially, I didn't love it. Alan is jolly, light, and silly. I didn't get how that worked with yoga. He wasn't serious enough; it irritated me that he was having such a good time. But ultimately I saw embodied in them an extraordinary

love of life, a sense that spirituality and living a practical life weren't in conflict. Prior to that, I saw yoga and the real world as totally separate. Tantra showed me how I could blend the best of both. I studied one-on-one, got a personal practice, grew my confidence, and discovered that my job on the planet was to teach.

**What was the environment like when you started teaching?** In L.A. there were six or seven studios in a 40-square-mile area—a yoga hotbed. Bryan Kest, Paul Grilley, Steve Ross, Baron Baptiste, Ana Forrest, Chuck Miller and Maty Ezraty, Gary Kraftsow. Richard Freeman and John Friend came through. You couldn't fit all our egos in one building now. It was perfect—everyone was

humble, and we helped each other learn and grow. Business was tough; not a lot of people practiced, so there wasn't ambition about making money. Teaching yoga wasn't a career choice, but a life choice. The best part is, I had a good 10 or 12 years of teaching and growing before I became popular. Now, good teachers get popular too quickly and stop being students too early.

**What do you wish more yoga students knew?** That yoga doesn't end with the body. My mission is to impart old-school wisdom, teach pranayama and meditation as much as asana, and encourage people to access that inner realm beyond the body. When you connect with the source, the *shakti*, the sea of intelligence, every part of your life improves. You'll be more joyful, more fearless, and more capable.

**Do you practice with your sons?** We're starting a five-minute practice before school. It'll help them embrace a deeper dimension to life. The other day, Jaden asked, "When I was born, what came first: an inhale or an exhale?" It's a really good question. They're little gurus. ■