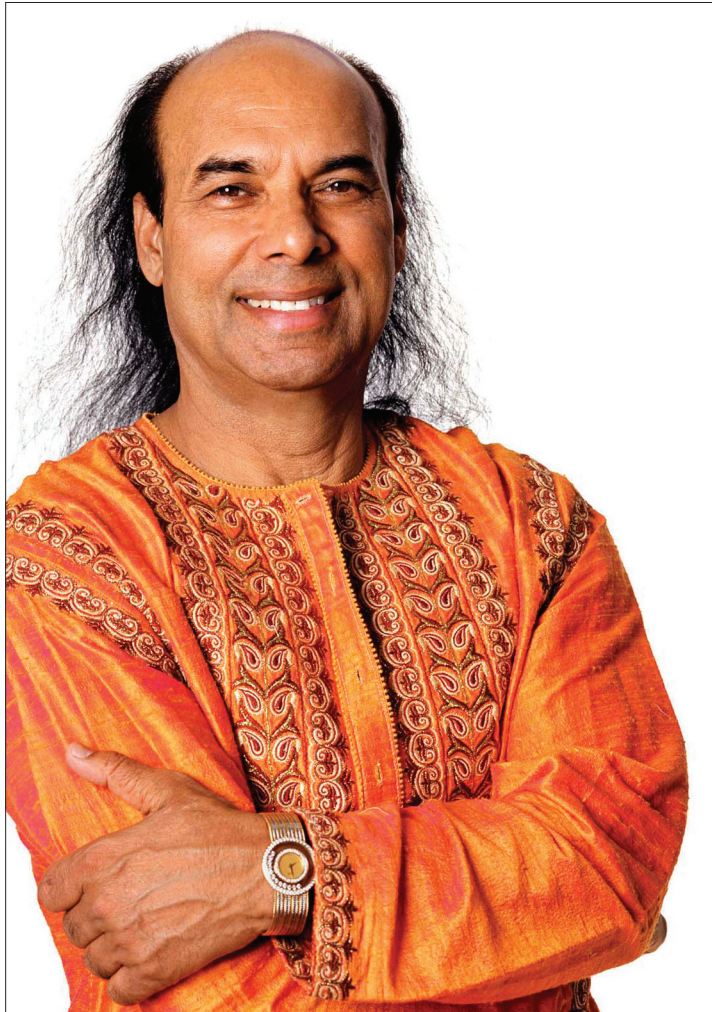


the yj interview

by Diane Anderson



Hot Commodity

Bikram Choudhury brought hot yoga to the masses. Now he aims to end terrorism.

(author of *The Autobiography of a Yogi*). At 13, Choudhury became the youngest person ever to win the All-India Yoga Asana Championship. At 18, he was told he wouldn't walk properly again after a weightlifting accident shattered his knee, but he healed his body, he says, with yoga. Now his copyrighted Bikram Yoga counts around 500 studios and more than 6,000 teachers. Choudhury promises that if students practice his sequence consistently, it will cure their "junkyard bodies and screws-loose minds."

BORN IN CALCUTTA, India, Bikram Choudhury learned asanas as a boy. His teacher was Bishnu Ghosh, the brother of Paramahansa Yogananda

What did you learn from your guru, Bishnu Ghosh?

To use yoga to control the mind. Your mind is supposed to be your friend. But, in many cases, it's your No. 1 enemy. People eat, eat, eat or drink, drink, drink; lie, lie, lie; cheat, cheat, cheat until they die. Why? No self-realization. My guru taught me how to use yoga to live a dignified, decent, clean, healthy, happy, peaceful life. That is what I sell. A long life. A good life.

Why the heat, mirrors, strict instructions? In a warm room, you stretch the body better. You can't do standing postures without a mirror. Take my Dandayamana Dhanurasana, or Standing Bow Pose. When I say "foot over the head," you need the mirror. And my words. When you come to class, listen only to me. Forget who you are; don't even think. My class is a meditation. Use your body to still the mind. Got the picture?

Why copyright the sequence of 26 poses? It activates every molecule. Follow? You touch coccyx chakra to crown chakra. You awaken *kundalini*. You become Jesus Christ. Or Buddha. My yoga formula works for everybody. When you want to practice medicine, you need a license. If you want to teach Bikram Yoga, you have to learn from my school and graduate. Too many unqualified people were teaching and hurting each other. I had to patent, trademark, and copyright my excellent product, American style.

You think yoga should be in the Olympics? Sports give kids discipline, but you can't always do them. But we can do yoga at 100. With yoga, kids won't do drugs, smoke, drink, go to jail. Competitions will increase yoga's popularity. We can make this world heaven if every child does yoga.

What's the biggest misconception people have about you?

People wonder why I have Rolls-Royces, a diamond wristwatch, live in Beverly Hills. I don't want to live in a cave in the Himalayas and meditate for myself only. That's no good for society! I want to spread yoga around the world. I save lives. That is my karma yoga. My next goal? To stop terrorism and the hate trade—politicians making money from guns and wars. You know why people hate each other? No self-realization. With yoga, you learn to like yourself, love yourself. You can then take care of yourself, your family, your country. That's spiritual enlightenment. I can bring it. You watch. ■

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