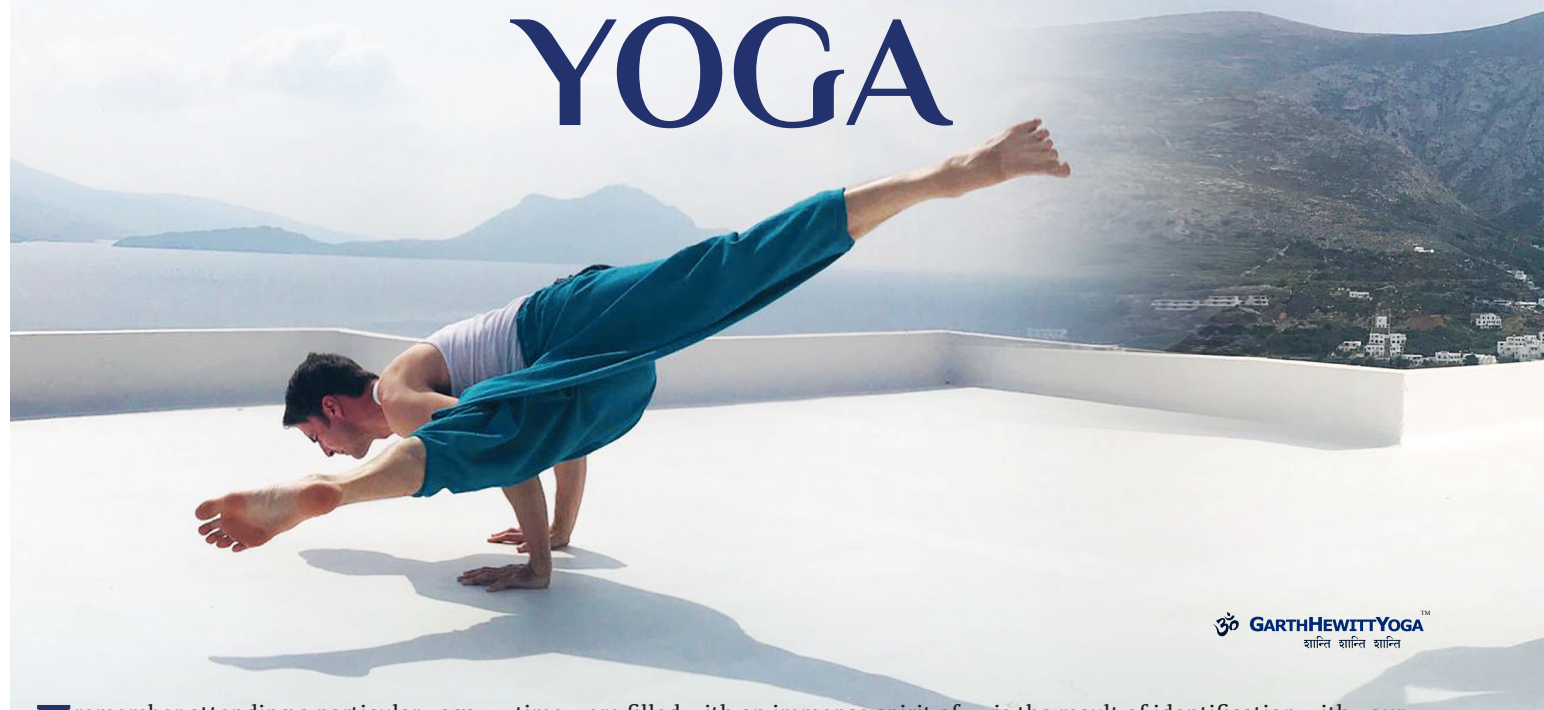




Shiva Yoga

Love and kindness are the true essence of YOGA



ॐ GARTHHEWITT YOGA™
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I remember attending a particular yoga session by my teacher Dharma Mittra when I was a new student at his centre in New York. Though it was a master class, students of all levels were present in the room. Some of them were far more advanced than me, while others were finding it quite challenging.

We had to hold the parivrtta parsvakonasana (revolved side angle pose) for a long time. I noticed that a woman was having a tough time maintaining her balance. She kept falling over and appeared distressed. Watching her, I began to judge her, wondering what this beginner was doing in a master class. I feel embarrassed when I look back at myself now.

However, what happened next moment forced me to introspect. The students around the woman began encouraging her with kind words. Instead of focusing on their own practice, they channeled their energy and attention towards her. The student in front of her came out of his advanced asana and walked over to her offering help. He said, “It’s ok. This is a hard pose. You’re doing great,” while the others offered smiles. I witnessed these beautiful gestures and I suddenly realized that what I was doing on my yoga mat wasn’t yoga. I wasn’t practicing yoga, I was practicing asana. This moment stayed with me after the class was over.

The other classes I had been taking at that

time were filled with an immense spirit of competitiveness. I, too, was egoistic about my practice. This pursuit of perfecting the asanas, all the fancy tricks and transitions ... what was the point? Somehow, somewhere, we had gotten off track; we had missed the point. What happened in Dharma’s class that day, THAT was yoga.

“When you are doing things together, you are inside the collective mind, and share psychic knowledge with each other. That is how you become one”

— Sri Dharma Mittra

During my multiple visits to New York in the past eight years undergoing 800-hours of Teacher Training with Dharma, my physical practice has become stronger. I’ve mastered several advanced poses and met some incredible yoga practitioners. Dharma teaches that the number one practice is to be kind and respectful towards all living beings. He insists that the asanas don’t really matter if you aren’t practicing kindness and compassion in your life.

Yoga philosophy teaches us that yoga is the experience of our true nature. Who are you at the centre of yourself? You are the experience of compassion. You are the experience of kindness. You are pure love. Separation exists only in your mind, and

is the result of identification with your ego. Imagine, for moment, that there’s no you and no me. For a moment, there’s no separation. We are travellers on a journey home, to experience who we really are, underneath all the layers of who we thought we were.

Practicing yoga is so much more than being able to do a fancy pose. As a yoga teacher, one of my goals is to encourage the same sense of community in my classes as I have experienced with my teacher Dharma. I want my students to be able to connect with each other, as well as with the deepest part of themselves, and help each other along the way on their journey.

“Be kind to everyone; forgive everyone everything”

— Sri Dharma Mittra

Recently, one of my students was having a tough time in class. I noticed that a lot of the time she would simply leave when it got too tough for her. Though I tried to make her stay suggesting that she could rest a bit instead of giving up on herself, this habit of hers was hard to break. One day, I was standing right in front of her when she got up in the middle of the class and began heading for the door, trying to avoid eye contact with me. I stopped instructing the class, smiled at her and



said “You can stay, you can do this, you don’t have to leave.” She stopped and looked at me and the entire class paused to look at her. For what seemed like a long moment we all anticipated her next move. Suddenly, you could feel the room’s energy shift and everyone began to encourage her to stay, either with a smile or a nod. Some said to her, “You can do it” and “We’re tired too. It’s ok. We’ll all do it together.” I could see tears in her eyes. I had tears in my eyes too. We were both overwhelmed with all the love in the room. She smiled at me and went back to her mat. I thought of that class with Dharma, years ago.

This moment was a very special moment

for me as a teacher. I watched this strong group of my regular students not just doing asanas but taking it beyond the mat and practicing yoga. I was proud to be their teacher.

After the class, I talked to the student who stayed back. She said she had never received such abundant love from a group of people like that before. These moments make me love my job as a yoga teacher.

These are the greatest things that we can teach our students:

Be kind and respectful to others. Open your heart. Love. Help someone who needs help.

“It is very good to see thousands of new teachers, so that with our thoughts, we can gradually change the world – send peace to the world. That’s the best contribution to world peace – first the students should find their peace, and then they share with the other students”

— Sri Dharma Mittra

Teacher-Speak



Students often try to imitate the exact postures that the teachers do. They focus too hard on the hand or the leg or the head placement and forget how to breathe while getting into the pose. This competition is not only prevalent in class, but also on social media where people try to put up pictures of perfect asanas. You never know what goes on behind the picture, whether the person is actually able to hold the pose or got injured trying to get it right for the sake of being part of the online fad. This obviously affects the true aspect of practicing yoga.

— Mahua Deb is based in Fujairah and has been teaching yoga for five years

Yoga refers to a higher consciousness that exists within all of us. Through yogic practices such as meditation and asana, we peel off the layers that prevent us from experiencing a higher state of being. Although yoga is now more commonly known as a sequence of poses, more practitioners are beginning to understand that yoga isn’t something that we do, but it is what we have become. I have observed that several yogis struggle with breathing in the practice. It is natural to be competitive, I have to keep reminding students that asana is not the end goal.

— Joumana Saber is based in Dubai and has been teaching yoga for nine years