

Rodney Yee has been teaching yoga for 10 years.

# rodney yee

**MENTOR TO MANY, MASTER TO NONE**

**By Suzy Feine**

He has been called the "stud-muffin guru." Many have coined the phrase "yoga master" when speaking of him. But Rodney Yee will modestly tell you he is simply a "teacher," dedicated to this ancient yet newly rediscovered form of

body-healing and stress-relieving exercise called yoga. "I don't believe in the word 'master,'" he says. "I'm a yoga teacher."

To some, yoga is merely a form of stretching and a way to increase flexibility. To Yee, the benefits of yoga are far-

reaching and deeply moving. "Yoga totally changed my life," he says. "Not only has it given me a profession, but it's given me a means in which I feel I can be more present every day that I practice. Every day of my life I feel like I can be more myself, be courageous about who I am and be honest about who I am. And it also gives me the means of living out my philosophy, so it gives me the courage and the insight to live more truthfully, less violently, more in alignment with universal philosophies."

## Yoga Beginnings

Born in California with a rich ancestry reaching back to China, Yee currently lives with his family in Piedmont, Calif., near his studio, the Piedmont Yoga Studio. At his studio, the staff teaches Ashtanga Yoga, which means the "Eight Limbs of Yoga," and entails universal precepts, individual guidelines, postures, breath channeling, turning the senses inward, concentration, meditation and union. All instructors, including Yee, are well versed in the teachings of Iyengar yoga, a practice Yee first discovered during the formative years of his yoga training when he was only 23.

During the 1980s, Yee was a physical therapy/philosophy major at UC Berkeley and a ballet dancer for the Oakland Ballet



Company. To increase flexibility, Yee attended his first yoga class at the Yoga Room of Berkeley and from that moment on, he was hooked. "I remember taking my first class and thinking, 'this is OK,' and then leaving the class and thinking 'why do I feel so good?'"

Following that first class, Yee was surprised at how clean he felt and how emotionally and physically balanced his body and mind felt. "I had been pretty involved in all kinds of physical things – ballet and gymnastics – so I was surprised at the time," he says. "I started doing [yoga] once a week and continued to be astounded at the way it made me feel and what it started doing for me so far as opening up my body and stabilizing my emotional body." Yee quickly began to incorporate yoga into his weekly routine.

While touring with the Oakland Ballet Company, Yee traveled to Japan to dance professionally. Away from the Yoga Room of Berkeley, he found a mentor who would

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change his life. "There was a yoga teacher in the company and he would teach me on the side during rehearsals and it became more and more important," he says. "I came back to the U.S. and decided not to join the [Oakland] Ballet Company."

### **Mind-Body-Spirit**

From then on, Yee began studying Iyengar/Hatha yoga and was deeply influenced by the Iyengar teaching methods. For Yee, yoga quickly became a means to connect with his mind, body and spirituality, and to break down his social conditioning and bring him back to his original self. "It's taught me to understand who I

am without the confines and structure of what people have told or taught me to be," he says. "Yoga's given me the freedom to liberate my body and mind."

This mind and body freedom allows Yee to release stress and create relaxation so that his body can function as nature intended. "[Yoga has] created a much more flexible, strong and natural body in the sense that I feel like my body is more in tune and coordinated with its natural function," Yee says. "So the bones are used to support the body, muscles are used for circulation and movement, the breath permeates the entire body easily and the hormonal system stays in balance."

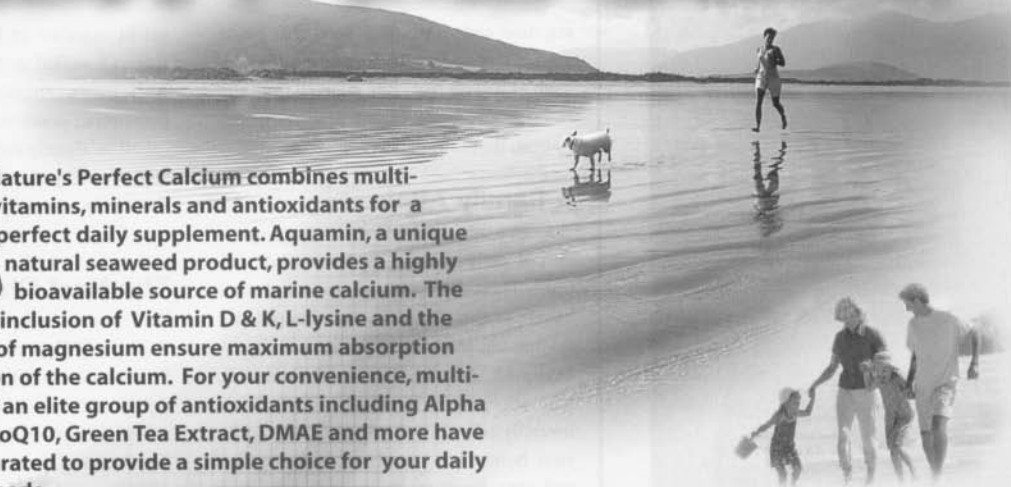
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## HIGHPROFILE

### YEE'S FAVORITE YOGA POSTURE

The Full Lotus posture increases flexibility, stimulates the nerves in the legs and thighs, and allows for quiet meditation. For Yee, this posture accomplishes many things. "It just puts me in a place where it feels like it supports my entire body; it creates an amazing sense of support and quietness," he says. "So it just feels like it gets me into a place of incredible centeredness and meditative state."



Spiritually, yoga has allowed Yee to connect with his beliefs on a deeper level. "I think that once you start listening to your inner voices, once you start listening to your breath and your body, once you give yourself time to listen to yourself, you allow yourself to connect with your spirit," he says. "And I think it's a matter of spend-

ing time with yourself in ways that create a quietness and a relaxation and I think as soon as you do that, give yourself time and relax with yourself, I think your spirit arises from that foundation."

helped launch Yee's latest video: *Yoga Journal's Family Yoga*. In it, Yee practices different poses alongside his wife and children. "The kids lead some of the poses and we lead some of the poses," he says. "The whole family practices together."

*Yoga Journal's Family Yoga* motivates and encourages parents and children to

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#### A Family Affair

Yee and his wife, Donna, teach yoga almost daily at their studio in Oakland, Calif. Their dedication to yoga and their beliefs in the discipline that this practice teaches has transferred to their children—Evan, 13, Adesha, 10, and Johanna, 7, who also practice regularly. "Their father basically tells them, 'OK, you have to do your homework, you have to play piano and you have to do yoga,'" says Yee. "Those are the requirements, everything else is their time."

This family-spurred routine has

get fit together. In this video, Yee's softer side is revealed as he assists his children with poses, encouraging them lovingly into proper position. "A lot of people have called us already and said just by the mere fact of seeing the kids lead the practice, their kids are excited about doing that," says Yee.

#### The Next Chapter

Yee's newest book, *Moving Toward Balance: 8 Weeks of Yoga with Rodney Yee* (Rodale Press), was recently released. This book delves even deeper into yoga practices and philosophies than his first book, *Yoga: The Poetry of the Body* (St. Martin's Press, 2002).

For Yee, becoming an author allows him to further convey the benefits of yoga and expand on his yoga teachings.



"Because I have so many videos out there and because I teach all around the country, a book is just another way to get the word out there, but it has its own unique possibilities," he says. "A video is more of a structural routine; a book allows me to go much deeper into the philosophy and allows the reader to take their own time to get into their own rhythm."

Yee's future in yoga will be a continuation of his current teach-the-teacher programs. "More and more teachers are becoming competent at teaching public classes," he says. "I feel like more and more my responsibility comes in helping teach teachers. I've done that for the last 10 years."

In addition, Yee's focus will center on pulling yoga out of its previous stereotypical mindset and into the present day view as a tool to grow and nurture the mind, body and spirit. "If we can get people to not be scared of something that can be such a great tool for them, then more and more people try it and the better the education is, the better the teaching is, I think yoga will continue to flourish." ●●



### Yee has been featured in the following videos produced by Gaiam:

- Yoga Journal's Family Yoga
- Yoga Journal's Power Yoga Total Body
- Gaiam A.M. Yoga for Meditation
- Yoga Journal's Yoga Practice for Meditation
- Yoga Journal's Yoga for Back Care
- Gaiam Yoga Conditioning for Athletes
- Yoga Journal's Yoga for Intermediates
- Yoga Journal's Yoga for Strength
- Yoga Journal's Yoga for Energy
- Yoga Journal's Yoga for Meditation
- Yoga Journal's Yoga Remedies for Natural Healing
- Gaiam Power Yoga for Beginners: Stamina
- Gaiam Power Yoga for Beginners: Strength
- Gaiam Power Yoga for Beginners: Flexibility
- Gaiam A.M. Yoga for Beginners
- Gaiam Upper Body Yoga for Beginners
- Gaiam Abs Yoga for Beginners
- Gaiam Back Care Yoga for Beginners
- Gaiam Yoga for Two: Yoga for Beginners
- Gaiam The Art of Breath and Relaxation Video
- Yoga Break CD-Rom

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