yoga journal

LIFE

The YJ Interview: Steve Ross

One of the first to rock out in yoga class, Steve Ross aims to bring the love and joy of music and asana to all his students.

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A guitarist who once recorded and toured with bands such as Fleetwood Mac, the Beach Boys, and Men at Work, Steve Ross meditated while fellow rock stars were, well, partying like rock stars. Doing yoga and eating a raw vegan diet made him happy. After studying various traditions and even living as a monk, he returned to L.A. and opened Maha Yoga in tony Brentwood, teaching classes with the music pumping. The author of Happy Yoga, Ross says his aim is to help students to enjoy yoga and have fun. He has two chanting albums and often performs with Krishna Das.

Yoga Journal: How did you get introduced to yoga?

Steve Ross: My dad taught me postures when I was 11—full Lotus and such. Later it was mentioned in [Ram Dass's] Be Here Now, which I read. I did it on my own and sought out teachers. By the time I was 18 and touring, I was practicing regularly. Everyone else was drinking and doing whatever they were doing, and I was meditating and eating pure. There wasn't much out there back then. It was mostly Sivananda based, no Iyengar or Ashtanga. But I continued to seek out teachers.

YJ: Who were your most influential teachers?

SR: Ganga White and David Williams and others. asana is great, but meditating, studying, and chanting are important. People aren't as interested in scriptural studies. Luckily, I met an Indian guru in Australia who tapped me on the head. I had a strong, altered-state experience and thought "Whoa." So I followed him—Swami Muktananda—for years in India and the U.S. I lived as a monk in the Vedic tradition, studying the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, the Yoga Sutra, and more. He told me to go back in the world and share what I had learned. I didn't want to. Going back into an insanely dysfunctional world was like getting punched in the face. But I maintained my joyful state.

YJ: What do you wish more students knew?

SR: You can be sincere and intense without taking yoga so seriously. It doesn't have to be like church—rigid or fundamentalist. Ask yourself why you are practicing. So you can say, "I pushed my little toe down perfectly"? To get external approval from the teacher? To shape your thighs or boost your self-esteem? Any approach works. Doing asana opens the nadis. But combine that with Pranayama, meditation, and philosophy, and yoga's an incredible life-changing system. You can soar and merge with the infinite. Yoga is here to produce love and joy

YJ: So the music helps?

SR: My approach at Malibu Yoga in the mid-'80s was to use modern music. Purists who thought that was not traditional criticized me. But if you're traditional, you don't use props, your diet is restricted, you don't have sex, and you only teach private sessions. What's traditional? I started playing music to make it more fun. Why impose misery when it can be so happy? Adding music brings yoga to a different emotional level. I just want to inspire people to be happy. So that's what I do. And I love it.