

## **Ran in the *Downtown Brooklyn Review*, Brooklyn, NYC, New York -- April 2001**

Headline: OM's the word

Subhead: Yoga has taken the exercise world by storm, but is it the right choice for you?

By Dawne Brooks

We are a population swayed by fads. Aside from the fashion world, nowhere is this truer than with exercise. The overly perky, perpetually thonged aerobics instructor says step, and we step. Billy Blanks says tae bo, and we kick. The fitness magazine tells us it's not enough to simply bike anymore, but we must power bike – and we shift it into gear.

So, like many a New Yorker with a closet full of now defunct exercise equipment collecting dust, perhaps you were skeptical when hearing yoga is the latest rage. Sure, Madonna's doing it, but that's not necessarily convincing. After all, she also popularized the '80s street tramp look and feigned an English accent for a year. Celebrities aren't always ideal to imitate.

But unlike, say, step aerobics, yoga has been around for centuries, and offers mental and spiritual aspects unparalleled in other exercise regimes. And some New York City yoga instructors are convinced this fad has definite staying power.

"I think a lot of its recent popularity has to do with yoga really meeting the Westerner's needs," said Kathleen Kearney, a certified instructor and owner of Yoga @ hOMe, which offers private and group instruction in the home or office. "People like the idea, especially New Yorkers, of being able to get the workout in as well as meditation."

Yoga would seem especially ideal then for the young, stressed professional, opting for both fitness and stress management in one routine. And with these ultra-driven, hard-working types finally recognizing a need to do something positive to counteract stress, yoga classes around the city have been filling up quicker than you can say ashtanga vinyasa.

"Not everyone is going to stick with it, but I believe yoga is ultimately more than a trend," said Carol Hutchinson (Vilas), a Kripalu certified yoga instructor with 20 years of teaching experience and owner of Breathing Room in Brooklyn. "With practice, it really does work to feel better mentally and physically, and stressful, externally oriented attitudes do begin to shift."

Does that mean you'll have the urge to shave your head, chant a lot, and hang out with Hare Krishnas after your first session? Well, anything's possible, but it's not required. You'll inevitably come out of the experience with some good karma, though.

"The practice works its magic on you," said Kearney. "Some people may never chant an OM, but the practice brings you into the divine in its own way, even if it's just that you treat someone a little nicer on the train to work the next morning."

So if Eastern philosophies in exercise were putting you off, never fear. The key to taking up yoga, according to instructor and Anjali Yoga owner Ellen Achilles, isn't to throw yourself in all at once. Rather, she recommended starting slowly in a beginner level course to get a firm knowledge of the practice first.

"There's so many different teachers and styles, especially in Manhattan, that what's important is to keep looking until you find the teacher and style that resonates with you," Achilles said.

Hutchinson agreed.

"Find a good, experienced, certified instructor that you connect to personally and that you feel can teach you, not just demonstrate a series of postures," said Hutchinson. "Otherwise, it can feel more like calisthenics dressed with new music and Sanskrit."

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“I don’t think that there’s anyone that yoga’s not for,” Kearney added. “I think if anyone is considering taking a yoga class, but maybe is afraid, they should give it a try anyway, because it’s truly special experience.”

YOGA SIDEBAR #1:

Headline: Yoga sources

Yoga @ hOMe, Kathleen Kearney, (212) 501-2432, private home or office instruction in NYC and Brooklyn

Anjali Yoga, Ellen Achilles, (212) 585-2642, prana yoga style classes, [www.anjaliyoga.com](http://www.anjaliyoga.com)

Breathing Room, Carol Hutchinson (Vilas), (718) 768-4608, [www.artpost.com/breathingroom](http://www.artpost.com/breathingroom)

YOGA SIDEBAR #2:

Headline: OM away from home

If a quick yoga session on your lunch break just isn’t cutting it, maybe it’s time you look into a yoga retreat. From weekend renewals to full-on restorative vacations, the following ashrams are within driving distance of the city. And when you take into consideration the vegetarian fare and lodging included in the price, it’s a mere pittance for the chance to center your chi.

The Himalayan Institute  
R.R. 1, Box 400  
Honesdale, PA 18431  
(800) 822-4547  
[www.himalayaninstitute.org](http://www.himalayaninstitute.org)

Kripalu Center  
P.O. Box 793  
West St., Route 183  
Lenox, MA 01240  
(800) 741-7353 or (413) 448-3152  
[www.kripalu.org](http://www.kripalu.org)

Sivananda Ashram Yoga Ranch  
P.O. Box 195  
Budd Road  
Woodbourne, NY 12788  
(914) 436-6492  
[www.sivananda.org](http://www.sivananda.org)

Ananda Ashram  
13 Sapphire Road  
Monroe, NY 10950  
(914) 782-5575  
[www.anandaashram.org](http://www.anandaashram.org)

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