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TRENDS

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Guyana-born master makes yoga a family affair

"The most effective way to teach children anything is to live it yourself," says Leela Mata. She is wife of world renowned hatha yoga teacher and spiritual musician Yogi Hari. Together they decided early in life to set an example by living family life in a yogic manner. Now married 33 years, they've brought up four fine children while teaching yoga and music to thousands of students.

Yogi Hari was born Hari Narine Sukhu on June 22, 1945, and grew up in the Indian community of Guyana, the only English-speaking country in South America. The 1990 population was estimated at 756,000, one third of which are Hindus. In college, Hari met Leela Mata; they married soon after. A trained land surveyor, he took a job surveying in Guyana's jungle, which covers over 80 percent of the country and is home to the 500-pound Anaconda Boa constrictor.

"I used to be sick all the time and was constantly on medication," Hari recalls of those early years. Wife Leela was pursuing an interest in spirituality and strategically left a book on hatha yoga out where Hari would discover it. Still trusting

Western medicine, Yogi Hari initially ignored the book. However, one day when he felt particularly ill, he secretly took the book to his room and tried some of the yoga postures. To his surprise, they helped. He continued his practice privately, growing stronger and stronger. Within a few weeks, he stopped seeing his doctor and was free of medications for the first time in many years.

Propelled by his initial success, Hari attended every retreat and class he could, and became quite accomplished. In 1973 he studied yoga with his guru, Swami Vishnudevananda, on Paradise Island in the Bahamas. But it was in 1975, at the World Yoga Teacher's Conference, that he met Swami Nadabrahmananda. This great musician taught nada yoga, the study and application of sound vibration as a tool for healing and uplifting the emotions. Yogi Hari became one of the rare disciples of this swami, immersed himself in the study of this little-known yoga and became an expert mystical and devotional singer. Hari gathered his family and traveled with Swami in a station wagon from ashram to ashram.

After seven years of itinerant ashram life, he and Mata decided they and their four young children needed to settle down. But they didn't want to give up yoga. After a short while, they were able to establish Nada Productions in Florida to produce music tapes and yoga videos and conduct yoga classes, retreats and yoga teacher training courses. He began teaching classes all over the world, in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Brazil, England, South America, across the United states and elsewhere.

His teacher-training seminars are unique, as they are

conducted in Yogi's own home with small, intimate groups. As one student, Jim Morano said, "It was not just a course. It was an example of living daily life with spiritual depth. It could not have been more rewarding."

As man and wife, the two make an unstoppable team, partners in a spiritual journey who benefit greatly from each other. In an interview with Yoga International, Hari said, "For me, my greatest guru has been my wife. She is my best teacher. All the time she has been there as an anchor and a support."

Yogi Hari is most famous for his mastery of hatha yoga, and he's spreading his teachings through video and audio practice tapes. He has also recorded more than thirty music tapes of scriptural verses, bhajanas and chants, and written a book about Indian music. Elizabeth Chene, from Brussels, said after a week of nada yoga in Germany, "What he shared with us could keep us glued to the floor for one hour practically in a state of ecstasy. I had a clear impression that those moments of nada yoga prepared the body through the kind of internal message induced by the sound vibrations."

Yogi Hari believes that all life is flowing smoothly upwards to God. His message is-- don't resist. "After all, how long can you resist God? He is the magnet of all magnets, and to reach him is complete fulfillment."

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