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## The True Mark: Interview with a Yoga Teacher

Gina Cariño



Mark Shveima was born and raised near Philadelphia. He is about to leave San Francisco for the Land of the Rising Sun. Before becoming a yogi, he was a singer in a hard rock band.

**GC: Mark, how did you go from hard rock to yoga?**

MS: I had been performing in bands for seven years when I started exploring the yoga practice. In hindsight, my voice and lyrics were my way of attempting to connect to people around me in a more authentic way. Yoga swept me into its current, and became a more powerful vehicle of connection.

**GC: What are you doing in the picture?**

MS: Expressing my delight and deep gratitude for the gift of the ocean. The pose or asana is *baddha parsvakonasana*.

**GC: How did teaching yoga become your *dharma*, or path?**

MS: I began my practice with videotapes. At my first "live" yoga class, the teacher asked, "Have you ever thought about teaching?" Those six words were the catalyst for what has become my life work.

**GC: Here in Spain, it's mostly Hatha Yoga that's taught. You are a teacher of Anusara Yoga®. What is Anusara? Is it good for beginners?**

Anusara Yoga has three things that differentiate it from other styles. First, we use bio-mechanical principles of alignment based on the way nature structures itself. As a practitioner becomes more and more fluent in the many layers of the principles, he or she opens not just the outer body, but the subtle pathways and energetics of the inner body that lead to a refinement of both physical awareness and awareness of consciousness itself. This supports the highest intentions of the yoga practice, which are ensconced in the sanskrit word *chidananda*. *Chit* is the power to know, and *ananda* is the divine freedom-bliss that arises from knowing. The highest attainment of the yoga practice is to know one's heart intimately, so that you naturally and spontaneously commune with the Great Heart of Consciousness. Secondly, Anusara is steeped in the tantric teachings of Shaivism, a non-dualistic approach to Hindu cosmology. This means Spirit and Nature (Shiva and

Shakti) are revered in their union. In classical yoga, Spirit and Nature are viewed as separate, with Spirit being superior to Nature. The third unique aspect is the emphasis on *kula*. *Kula* means a like-hearted group of beings coming together to study, practice, share, inspire, and awaken to the truth of reality. Within the *kula*, each individual has his or her own unique gifts and limitations, all of which are seen as possibilities for awakening.

**GC: How do you prepare for class?**

MS: I have a daily meditation and chanting practice that assists in refining my ability to communicate verbally. In addition, before class I do a short asana practice to stimulate a more open receptivity in myself to the energy of the students on a physiological level.

**GC: What is the fundamental lesson you try to teach?**

MS: The cultivation of awareness, so that interactions with oneself and one's immediate and global community become more beneficent. We each have a gift that needs to be brought forth to serve the healing of this world. Refinement of awareness is key to knowing what your particular gift is, and then nurturing it to blossom into the most beautiful offering possible.

**GC: You have studied and taught yoga in many places. How is it learned and taught in each place?**

MS: I have been to France, Brazil, Japan, and Thailand. Parisian students seem to practice for the joy of stretching and moving their bodies, and the release of tension this brings them. In Brazil there is a fiery passion to inquire into all aspects of the practice. Japanese students enter yoga with a level of awareness and sensitivity that takes others, myself included, two or three years of dedicated practice to reach. The few Thais I have taught are primarily interested in knowing the "correct" way to do a pose and the mindfulness of yoga. This is, of course, only a general observation, and not the rule in all cases.

**GC: Is San Francisco an ideal place for what you do?**

MS: Yes, and no. It is a yoga mecca here, of sorts, and that is what drew me to SF in the first place. However, there is an over-abundance of teachers and studios, which often makes it highly competitive. This, ironically, occurs predominantly at the yoga studios, which is why I made the choice to primarily teach in health clubs. On the positive side, however, there are many opportunities to teach. I will actually be moving to Kyoto, Japan, at the end of September, and expect to be radically shifted by that place to the next level of my incarnation.

**GC: When you see someone on the street, can you tell if they do yoga?**

MS: Yes, if they're carrying a yoga mat. Honestly, someone with very good posture or a sense of outward confidence and discipline could have acquired that through many other avenues. Furthermore, just because someone practices yoga, it doesn't mean they're compassionate, or conscious. It is how we each live, not how our asana practice looks, that is the true mark of an awakened being.

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