



Gurudev Shri Amritji

Carrier of the Kripalu Lineage to the West

Gurudev Shri Amritji (Yogi Amrit Desai) is one of a handful of gurus who came to America from India in the early 1960s. This wave began the initial Yoga craze that has grown into the massive and diverse Yoga practices we have worldwide today. Amritji has been repeatedly honored for being one of the earliest pioneers to play a significant role in bringing yoga to the west. He is the last living guru from this initial wave.

The ancient spiritual teachings of India were first introduced in the West by H. H. Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), followed by another prominent spiritual master, H. H. Paramahansa Yogananda (1893-1952). Amritji arrived in North America eight years after Yogananda's passing.

Following in the footsteps of the earlier great yogis, reaching out to millions worldwide, Amritji has played a key role in recapturing and restoring the profound power of the authentic teachings of Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga and Yoga Sutras. Since the time of his arrival in the U.S. in February 1960 until today, he has made a significant impact in transforming the history of yoga in the Western world. He is recognized as one of the greatest emissaries of India's ancient yogic heritage.

In recognition of the global impact in the field yoga, he was honored in 2013 with the **International Yoga Grand Master** award, conferred by *Padma Shri* H.H. Jagat Guru Amrta Suryananda Maharaj. This award has only been previously awarded only to *Padma Shri* Dr. Nagendra of SVYASA University, Bangalore and B.K.S Iyengar.

Homegrown Gurus published by State University of New York, 2013: "...(*sic*) Desai remains at the forefront of the modern Anglophone (English-speaking) Yoga Revolution in America for almost four decades, with a growing international reputation. He also exports his teaching of Kripalu Yoga through personal demonstrations, talks and teacher training programs to more than 40 countries and acquires thousands of worldwide adherents. Desai's most noted innovation is that he was the first Indian-born ancient "American Yogi" to introduce systematic teachings and techniques on prana in the U.S."

Amritji's 1970 Kundalini awakening experience revealed to him that Patanjali's Yoga Sutras is a manual for the practice of Ashtanga Yoga rather than a philosophy of Yoga. Out of this realization, he designed a practice of Yoga that integrates the core principles of the Yoga Sutras into the practice of Ashtanga Yoga, a combined practice of Hatha and Raja Yoga.

Deepak Chopra said, "Yogi Amrit Desai is a pioneer in introducing Yoga to the West, but more significantly through his unique style, his method of teaching draws upon the original spiritual depth that is missing in the popular practice of Hatha Yoga."

Lord Lakulish and Kripalu Lineage

Amritji is the carrier of the Lord Lakulish and Kripalu Shaktipat lineage to the West. He was one of the few disciples to be entrusted with the deepest secrets of the lineage. He received not only Shaktipat diksha from his guru, H.H. Swami Sri Kripalvanandji, but also the rare blessing to give Shaktipat to his disciples in the West.

Dr. David Frawley, (Padma Bhushan) stated, *“Yogi Desai revived the ancient teachings of the millennial old Shaivite Yoga, rooted in the Lakulish tradition from Kayavarohan in Gujarat, one of the greatest centers of India’s older Yoga practices...Yogi Desai made these secret teachings once more alive and relevant to the entire world. He has left an indelible influence on modern Yoga, particularly in the West...Yogi Desai has demonstrated a Prana Siddhi in which he can allow the Universal Prana to move not only through his mind and body but also through his environment and into the audience around him, awakening their own inner prana and spiritual intelligence.”*

On Dec. 10, 1992, the late Prime Minister of India Chandra Shekhar wrote to India’s then Prime Minister Shri Narasimha Rao: *“Shri Amritji is an internationally renowned authority in the field of Yoga and exponent of the spiritual heritage for more than 30 years. He has dedicated his life not only to the in depth study and practice of Yoga but to spreading the ancient wisdom of India and its universal teachings throughout the world. Through his efforts, the Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health in Lenox, MA, USA, has grown fast and has received increased response from people around the world. In fact, I visited the center when I was in the USA and was deeply impressed by the dedication of the Yogacharya... I feel that Yogacharya Amritji deserves the honor for his work and therefore, recommend “Padma Vibhushan” for him as a special case.”* This request received a positive response from Prime Minister Rao.

The Rapid Progression of Amritji’s Life Work

Gurudev Shri Amritji started teaching Yoga in the early 1960s in the Philadelphia area. In the late 60’s he formed The Yoga Society of Pennsylvania. With the impact of his genuine in-depth spiritual teachings, his popularity attracted the media as well as large numbers of people to his lectures. He was repeatedly interviewed by newspapers and invited to appear as a guest on radio and television programs. During this time, he traveled and lectured widely, with invitations from all over the U.S., Canada and Europe spreading his innovative approach to audiences hungry for his unique style of Yoga and meditation.

The New York Times, April 1987. *“As Yogi Desai interacted with each person, it was not what he said that convinced me to trust him as a teacher. It was instead his presence...this combination of radiant energy and responding to each person with a respect, kindness and love that I had never seen before in any human being...”*

As his teachings rapidly expanded, more facilities were created to accommodate the growing demand.

- In 1966, the not-for-profit Yoga Society of Pennsylvania grew to 150 Yoga classes attended by more than 2,500 students per week, making it one of the largest Yoga organizations at that time. It created a tremendous following, requiring more in depth teacher trainings for the growing demand.
- In 1972, the first Kripalu Ashram was created in Sumneytown, PA, to fulfill the growing need. The ashram became a program center. It provided the residential staff and teachers the in depth study and practice of yoga, as well as a yogic lifestyle. As the attendance for programs grew, the residential staff grew to 70.

- In 1976, the new ashram in Summit Station, PA, was opened to accommodate the growth of the program participants and residential staff, offering a variety of health, yoga and spiritual trainings and programs. As a result, the residential staff grew to 150.
- In 1983, he founded the Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health in Lenox, MA. The staff of Summit Station was transferred to Lenox, as the growth of programs and participation more than doubled. The residential staff grew to 350. Kripalu is presently one of the largest Yoga and health centers in North America, offering a wide range of programs and professional trainings in health, spirituality, yoga, and more.

USA Today, November 9, 1988: “*Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health was included as one of the five finest health centers in America. It is among the most prestigious facilities in the country, such as the Charleston Retreat, The Golden Door and Canyon Ranch. Kripalu Center is by far the most economical and available of them all.*”

The New York Times, Sunday, April 7, 1991, reported: “*The Kripalu Center is a Yoga and meditation center that draws people seeking a more spiritual life...Kripalu is not a place that exists solely for the comfort of the visitors. It is a community of people who are seeking a spiritual path as followers of Yogi Amrit Desai while living at the Center.*”

Starting in 1966 and over the next 50 years, Amritji’s main focus has been to provide in depth spiritual teachings and the practice of authentic Yoga for the core residential staff of the five Yoga and health centers he has founded. This has made the core staff uniquely qualified to train the teachers to deliver the inner dimension of Yoga at the teacher training programs. By 1994 Yoga teachers were teaching in 52 states and 45 countries, and through affiliated networking, these teachings were reaching millions worldwide.

Smithsonian Publications (2014), Yoga: The Art of Transformation, page 100: “*The sixties brought an infusion of Indian gurus to the U.S., including Swami Muktananda...and Amrit Desai (b. 1932), who established the Yoga Society of Pennsylvania and Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health, named for his guru, Swami Kripalvanandji.*”

Today, more than 8,000 Yoga and Yoga Nidra teachers have been certified in the systems he developed. These teachers reach millions in more than 45 countries around the globe, including many European countries as well as China, Japan, Russia, Australia, Iceland and Canada.

State University of New York (2013), Homegrown Gurus,: “*Although Desai has not received scholarly attention, he has arguably been one of the most influential and sought-after figures in the development of Hatha Yoga in America over the last 40 years. The Kripalu Yoga Center was an innovative vehicle whereby he could transmit his charismatic leadership.*”

After his 1994 departure from the Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health, Amritji resumed teaching in 1996 at the original Kripalu Ashram in Sumneytown, PA. He refined his teachings into what is now known as The Integrative Amrit Method, I AM Yoga. It includes Amrit Yoga, Yoga Nidra, Quantum Breath Meditation and Yoga Therapy.

Amrit Yoga Institute (AYI), Salt Springs, Florida, was founded by Amritji in 2001. The thriving yoga ashram and program center offers professional trainings in yoga, yoga nidra, yoga therapy, and Quantum Breath meditation, as

well as a wide range of health and spirituality related of programs. In 2014, Amritji co-founded the International University of Yoga and Ayurveda, which offers in-depth coursework and certification for Ayurvedic Practitioners, as well as Pancha Karma detox programs on the AYI campus.

Humanitarian Recognition

2007 Paul Harris Award received from the **Rotary Foundation of Rotary International** in Naples, Florida for tangible and significant assistance given for the furtherance of better understanding and friendly relations among peoples of the world.

The Yug Prabha newspaper, Halol, India stated in a 2007 article, *“Yogishri Amrit Desai was honored in his home town of Halol for his humanitarian works known to offer scholarships to the poor and approximately 5,000 women are helped financially through the Bhuriben Trust he established... Helpless and poor patients receive free medicines and medical treatment... [H]e has financed the building of the new children’s school in Halol.”*

Yogi Desai’s humanitarian projects in India include:

- **Bhuribhen Trust** - Provides medical aid, supports children’s education and widow’s home industry
- **Lord Lakulish Temple, Kayavarohan; Kripalu Ashram, Malav (founded by Shri Amritji's guru, H.H. Swami Shri Kripalvanandji)** - Provided Services to the humanitarian works connected to these organizations
- **Ambulance** provided for the town of Halol
- **The Urmila Amrit Desai Shrishuvihar** – children’s school established in 2009
- **Computer College in Halol** - Donation of computer equipment

International Awards and Honors

- **International Yoga Grand Master, 2013** - from H.H. Jagat Guru Amrta Suryananda Maharaj “Padma Shri”. Only previous recipients were B.K.S. Iyengar and Dr. Nagendra, SVYASA University, Bangalore.
- **Maharishi Sandipani Award, 2013** - The Ujjain Yog Life Society International at the 4th International Yog Conference, held January 2014 in Ujjain, M.P. India.
- **Inaugural Fellow, Council for Yoga Accreditation International (CYAI), 2012** - The council recognized four inaugural Fellows who have demonstrated extraordinary achievement and contribution to the field of Yoga.
- **Patanjali Award, 2010** – Awarded for Excellence in Yogic Research and Teachings in North America, from the Association of Ayurvedic Professionals of North America (AAPNA).
- **Unity in Yoga Plaque, 1993** – In deep appreciation and honor for years of dedicated services to yoga in the Americas. Presented by Unity in Yoga Teachers Association celebrating 100 years of Yoga in America.
- **Padma Vibhushan Nomination, 1992** - Nominated by the late Prime Minister of India, Shri Chandra Shekhar, with a positive response from then Prime Minister Shri Narasinha Rao for 1993.

- **Vishwa Yoga Ratna, 1987** - Award conferred by the World Development Parliament of India, presented by the President of India in recognition of life long dedication and service in the field of Yoga to 10 world renowned teachers from 10 countries (India, USA, England, Australia, New Zealand, Italy, Belgium, Switzerland, Brazil, France). Gurudev was selected to represent the USA.
- **Maharishi, 1986** - Awarded by 105-year-old H.H. Sadguru Swami Gangeshwaranandji Maharaj, Udasin, chancellor of Udasin Sanskrit University, Benares, founder of 12 ashrams in India and 600 Ved Mandirs.
- **Jagadacharya, 1986** - conferred by the World Religious Parliament, New Delhi, India, established by Swami Vivekenanda in 1894. This honorable title was awarded to five world renowned teachers for spreading Hindu philosophy and wisdom worldwide.
- **Yogacharya, 1980** - conferred by H.H. Swami Shri Kripalvanandji, Amritji's guru and founder of Kayavarohan Tirtha Shiva Temple, Malov Ashram, and Lord Lakulish Yoga Institute, in honor of years of intensive study, teachings and practice of philosophy and spiritual principles of yoga.
- **Doctor of Yoga Science, 1974** - Awarded by H.H. Jagadaguru Shakaracharya Maharaj, Dwarka, spiritual leader of Hinduism, for outstanding contributions to humanity.

Publications and Book Awards

Seven Literary Awards: *Ancient Wisdom, Modern Master (2012)* - Amritji's biography. 1st place in the Yoga and Meditation division from the Living Now Book Awards, Book of the Year Finalist for Biography in the Foreword Reviews, and Honorable Mention in five festivals (Paris Book Festival, New York Book Festival, London Book Festival, Hollywood Book Festival, and Southern California Book Festival).

Three Awards: *Love and Bliss: Meditations on the Art of Living (2014)* – Collection of inspired poetry. 2nd place in the poetry division from the Great Midwest Festival and the Southern California Book Festival, and Honorable Mention in the Florida Book Festival.

Five Awards: *Yoga of Relationships (2015)* – Winner of the Nautilus Book Award; 1st place in the Great Midwest Book Festival; 2nd place in the Spiritual Division in the London Book Festival, and Honorable Mention in the Southern California Book Festival and the Paris Book Festival.

Amritji's books represent the distinctive original approach to what is missing from the popular approach to Hatha Yoga: *Kripalu Yoga Meditation in Motion (Books 1 & 2)*; *Amrit Yoga: Explore, Expand Experience, The Spiritual Depth of Yoga*; and *Amrit Yoga and the Yoga Sutras*.

Magazines and books featuring chapters or writings by Gurudev Shri Amritji include *The Surrender Experiment* by Michael Singer, *Homegrown Gurus, Yoga and the Path of the Urban Mystic, American's Alternative Religions, Ultimate Happiness* by Peter Mellon, *Transformative Adventures, Vacations, and Retreats, Voices on the Threshold of Tomorrow, The Spiritual Seekers Guide*, and *Kundalini Evolution and Enlightenment*. He is the author of the manuals of Amrit Yoga teacher training and Amrit Yoga Nidra teacher training, as well as hundreds of audios, videos, CDs and DVDs.

Reflections on the Life of Yoga Guru Shri Amritji

Pujya Swami Shri Dayananda, Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Saylorburg, PA, USA “Yogi Amrit Desai is one of the pioneers who introduced yoga in the West. With his own personal contribution, based on his experiments and experience, yoga sadhana has gained a credible therapeutic value. “

Dr. David Frawley, Pandit Vamadeva Shastri (Padma Vibhushan) “Yogi Desai has made an indelible influence upon modern Yoga, particularly in the West, not only in the outer world of teachings and institutions but also in the inner world of energy and awareness... Though yoga has gained much in popularity in recent years, it has perhaps lost something in terms of depth that the venerable yogi can grace us with in his teachings and reflections.”

107 Year Old Swami Buaji of New York “Our sacred Bharata Varsha will be proud of this illustrious son, Shri Amrit Desai Ji Maharaj, for flying aloft the holy banner of our ancient rishi culture dharma.”

Bhai Sahiba Bibiji Inderjit Kaur Khalsa, widow of Yogi Bhajan, and the Sikh Dharma Worldwide Family “Rare is the one who has served humanity with love and grace, with dignity and humility, with consciousness and compassion, in all of the ways that Gurudev has done. There are a few enlightened souls in this world that God has sent for a special purpose at critical times. He has dedicated his entire life to fulfill this divine mission and bring the light of consciousness to our world.”

Yogacharini Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani Gita Asrham, Pondicherry, India “Millions of beings are born daily, yet only a small number escape the common mold to create their own unique expression of the life force. One such unique being is Shri Amrit Desai... Amritji is a tender loving soul who has broken through the dense undergrowth of unconsciousness into the smooth pathway of consciousness and himself tried to fly into superconsciousness.”

Goswami Shri Dwarkeshlalji Maharajshri, Gadipati enthroned at Shashthpeeth, one of the seven gadi “Shri Amritji has created a holistic world outlook for the all-around emancipation of mankind. In a true sense he is a real Karma Yogi. Restoring the authentic practice of Patanjali’s classical work on Ashtanga yoga is represented in Amritji’s methods of yoga. Yoga Nidra and the quantum breath meditation are the combined practice of the Hatha and Raja yoga for creating a holistic practice.”

Swami Rajarshi Muni “Our guru, Swami Shri Kripalvanandji initiated both of us into higher yoga around the same period, in the year 1970... He is rendering invaluable services by propagating our guru’s yogic teachings among the spiritual aspirants in USA, Canada, and Europe... His ability to transmit Eastern spiritual wisdom to science-oriented Westerners is commendable, and there lies his originality.”