



Sri Dharma Mitra's 2013 New Year's Address to Students

How you start something is of great significance. If you start your year with a coffee in one hand and a cigarette in the other, that sets the tone for the entire year to come. Better to begin with yoga practices, especially the upper limbs.

It is traditional and recommended that you should start the New Year doing the right things, and then the rest of the year tends to follow in the same manner. Spend the first moments of the New Year fully absorbed in thoughts of the Almighty One. Move directly from that into doing good things: put your plans into action. For example, if you're planning to become vegan, the first day of the New Year is the best possible time to start. Also, do something good for others, to benefit others. If you start the New Year off drinking and smoking, the rest of the year is going to end up the same way. So, it is important to put all your good plans into action to start the New Year off right and, with all your effort, try to keep your word and honor the commitments you make. (It can happen to me occasionally that I cannot keep my word, and this is just so sad!)

The New Year has a good number in it: 13. You have to soon decide whether you are "going up or down". You cannot go in the middle anymore, there is only up or down – you have to make a decision. So, start doing good things: going to spiritually inspired yoga practices, go to visit a friend who is lonely or ill, give if you can to those in need and, as much as possible: help. Regarding the Spiritual Preceptor, you must ask him what you should do, and then make sure to be obedient.

Now begins the need for discipline. You have to write out your commitments on very thin paper – really write everything down. Don't put down anything too difficult to achieve, or you may not be able to keep to it. Then you should sign the contract and burn it, and then you cannot break the promises made. Upon writing down your promises, you should make a further commitment to go stand in front of a mirror. I remember once a long time ago when I was young and had difficulty in stopping smoking cigarettes. I made a promise to G-d: "For one year," (you see, I didn't say forever) "for one year, my Lord, I will not smoke." And then I kept to that. I knew I could not say five years, because five years seemed impossible at the time, so I came up with something that seemed more reasonable and attainable so I could keep my promise.

Many years ago, I made some commitments in this way: that is to say for all time. When your commitment is forever, you are not disturbed by it because you just know you're going to keep it. Then your senses do not disturb you because you will not change your mind no matter what. Many years ago, I promised: "I will never put anything alcoholic in my mouth again: that's it!" I kept that promise. Today, I avoid even one drop of alcohol because if you put even one drop into your body, you have broken your vow, and then, it's like a dam breaking. The dam starts cracking, the water begins pouring through and you are drinking.

If you have a spiritually endowed teacher, then you must be obedient, and see him or her as G-d. Then you'll be able to keep your vows, because how can you break a promise made to G-d? Learn to be obedient to your teacher, and follow all the directions given to you within the classroom and outside it. If you're not obedient, then don't make a commitment, or you will not keep up with the instructions. Remember without practice: there are disappointments, and you can never make any progress.

One of the questions that are asked with some frequency is from people who are becoming vegetarian. They have a concern this time of the year when they go home to visit family, and their Mother says to them: "I made this beautiful dinner of roast chicken for you." And then, they feel so guilty, because on one hand, they don't want to hurt their Mother's feelings, but, on the other hand, they have their vow to be vegetarian. So, there is to be no violence done towards the relationship, but at the same time you must keep your vows.

The best thing to do in this case would be to call or email your parents before they prepare any food for you. Let's say a week before you tell your Mother: due to my spiritual vows that I have to follow, I have to improve my compassion at least for the time being, and that means not eating any animals." (You don't say it's forever, or else they may think you've gone crazy!) "I'm not eating any animal items at the present time. Mommy, can you please prepare something else for me?" You have to advise them, help them to understand. If they really love you, they won't mind. If they are just not ready to even try and understand, that's a problem for you and for them. I have a student here at the Dharma Yoga Center who has that problem. She sometimes has to sneak around even to come here for classes because her Father doesn't want her to practice yoga. But, she does it anyway.

The best thing is to warn your family in advance, and to just be honest with them. If they don't understand, that's their problem – you did your best. For myself in this instance because I simply cannot hurt the animals and I cannot even contemplate polluting my subtle body. I just said something of this nature yesterday when I went out to a vegetarian Indian restaurant with my family. I said to them afterwards: "If you really love me, don't invite me to come to these places anymore, because when an old man like me eats rich

food, he enjoys it for five minutes, and then he'll sit around feeling awful for the rest of the day barely able to move or do anything." Yes, you should advise your loved ones in advance. Another example: I sometimes speak to students here at the Dharma Yoga Center who bring me gifts of food in this way. In the first place, I'm not supposed to touch a gift, but at the very least I tell them: "Please don't bring me junk food." Then they bring me vegan banana cake, and this and that. I say: "This also has junk in it. No matter how natural this banana bread is, it's still cake."

Temptation is difficult for everyone!

Again, the best thing is to call or email your parents before you go to visit them and say that you are doing some things differently now and, who knows? They may change their ways to accommodate you. Everybody suddenly decides: "Let's go out for a vegetarian dinner this evening: my daughter is coming!" You all end up going out to a wonderful vegan restaurant where they make delicious fake turkey or some such thing, and everyone has a wonderful, cruelty-free meal.

Make the commitment this New Year to keep animals off your plate!

With love Dharma Mittra

Legendary yoga teacher **Sri Dharma Mittra** first encountered yoga as a teenager before meeting his Guru in 1964 and beginning his training in earnest. Sri Dharma founded one of the early independent schools of yoga in New York City in 1975 and has taught hundreds of thousands the world over in the years since. Sri Dharma is the model and creator of the "Master Yoga Chart of 908 Postures", the author of *ASANAS: 608 Yoga Poses*, has released two DVD's to date - "Maha Sadhana" Levels I and II, and the Yoga Journal book *Yoga* was based on his famous Master Chart. Sri Dharma continues to disseminate the complete traditional science of yoga through daily classes, workshops and his "Life of a Yogi" Teacher Trainings at the Dharma Yoga New York Center and around the world. For more information on all things Dharma, please visit: www.dharmayogacenter.com.

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