

Written by Amy Wong

Meeting The Man Behind The Shadow

I USUALLY CONSIDER MYSELF to be conscious of what is going on around me, but when I entered a Los Angeles hotel room to interview Zhander Remete, the founder of Shadow Yoga, he seemed to appear out of nowhere, despite being in plain view. As his steady gaze fell on me, the thought “Jedi mind trick” floated through my head.

During the workshop that followed our conversation, the regal, yet relaxed Zhander proved that his physical prowess is as deft as his mental as he glided through the intricacies of his school of Yoga, twisting like a contortionist and effortlessly floating into gravity-defying arm balances. His teaching style is captivating and charismatic; at once stern and deeply compassionate, yet down-to-earth. A smile never seemed far even in his most intimidating moments.

Zhander, one of a few names that he goes by, was first introduced to Yoga and the bandhas by his father, at the age of six when living in his native Hungary. The family later moved to Australia. From this new home base Zhander continued his lifetime investigation of yogic traditions – Iyengar being a considerable influence – as well as dance, Japanese sword fighting and the natural order of the world.



Zhander Remete

A distillation of his studies yielded Shadow Yoga, a Hatha Yoga discipline that encompasses the principles of asana (posture), martial arts and dance, as well as the fundamentals of Ayurveda and Marmasthana, the Indian system of the 108 vital points of the body. Water, earth, wind, fire and ether – the five basic elements – as well as the planets and signs of the Zodiac and their influence on the human system, also factor significantly into the design and execution of the practice.

As for where the actual name originated, Zhander writes, “According to one of the forefathers of Hatha Yoga, Allama Prabudeva, ‘The appearance of this body is nothing but layers of frozen shadows.’ By investigating the shadow and its source we come to light. By coming to understand them we can dissolve them.”

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Shadow Yoga consists of three preludes, all designed to prepare the body for asana: Balakrama or Stepping into Strength, a bone strengthening form which engages the center (navel region), hands, feet and breath, while introducing uddiyana bandha; Chaya Yoddha Sancalanam or Churning of the Shadow Warrior, a warrior form that circulates the pranic winds (vayus) which flow through the body’s energetic channels (nadis); and Kartikeya Mandala or Garland of Light, an advanced warrior form that consists of stances and waist work which move the pranic force even deeper, eventually dissolving obstructions and allowing prana to flow freely.

On first sight of the preludes, I was taken by the beauty, grace and fluidity of the movements, which, unlike anything that I had seen in a Yoga class before, appeared to be a blend of Tai Chi or Qi Gong with Yoga. My initial attempts at the Shadow warm-up charanas (movements) though, were anything but graceful.

The charanas, not to mention the preludes, are multifaceted and challenging. I was especially intrigued by the spiraling motions, which I later learned were once considered an integral movement in the foundation of an asana practice, but have since slipped through the cracks.

Much of the preparatory work taught in the Shadow school, which is “essential for the learning of and the unfolding of the energetic principles of Yoga,” writes Zhander, is simply the resurrection of movements that have vanished from popular, and dare we say mainstream, Yoga traditions, often owing to the overemphasis on linear alignment, coupled with what seems to be a collective desire to skip past the grunt work and dive into more stimulating advanced asanas.

While my first exposure left me eager to delve deeper, there wasn’t a Shadow teacher for me to study under where I was living at the time and the style became shrouded in an air of mystery.

The style is relatively mysterious, as there are only a handful of teachers around the globe, something perpetuated by Zhander to prevent the style from becoming diluted. The manner in which the teachings are disseminated also adds to its underground nature; taking a drop-in class usually isn’t an option. Rather, teachers favor short-term courses, intensives and workshops, largely requiring pre-

registration. After a workshop, it is up to the student to maintain a home practice, knowing that in some cases, depending on where they live, or what classes are offered, a student might not see their teacher for weeks or months.

Even after I found Radhasri in my current hometown of Vancouver, British Columbia, the mystery continued, as in my novice state many teachings seemed to be conducted on a need-to-know versus a want-to-know basis, which was challenging for my overly analytical mind. I soon learned though, that Zhander believes that you remember what you are ready to practice, and the things that elude you signify that you aren't meant to be practicing them. It's the forms' way of keeping you safe.

I yielded and began to trust that I would absorb as much information as appropriate, including many of the lifestyle recommendations, like mita hara, the controlled intake of right foods and the cleansing of one's tongue upon rising. These suggestions, often sensible Ayurvedic principles, are aimed at building agni, inner fire, and encouraging the vayus to flow properly.

Letting things unfold in their own time was something reiterated in my conversation with Zhander. "Not a lot will come until people are ready" he said, going on to state that "It [Shadow Yoga] is not for everyone, it protects itself, only opening for those who are interested in it, who have a deep love for it and who will practice what is given."

When I asked Matt Schwartz of Golden Monkey Healing what it was like to study with Zhander for an extended period of time, he said, "You never know what you are going to get with him. The last time I was with Zhander we were learning how to work the energy internally. In a word, it was intense, but not necessarily physically intense. It's a lot to chew on."

Find Shadow Yoga in Los Angeles

Zhander Remete is teaching a workshop in LA, September 18 - 20. For more information, contact Matt Schwartz: matt@goldenmonkeyhealing.com

Matt Pesendian is teaching a series of three-week Monday evening (5:00 - 6:30 P.M.) workshop series at The Hub in West LA. The first fall immersion begins September 28 and the second begins November 2. For more information, visit Matt Pesendian's site at: bodhimanda.com. The Hub, 2001 S. Barrington Ave, Suite 150, Los Angeles, CA. (310) 575 - 4200, thehub-la.com.

Regularly scheduled morning Shadow Yoga classes are taught at Golden Monkey Healing in Sherman Oaks with Matt Schwartz, LAc and Matt Pesendian, LAc. Golden Monkey Healing, 13259 Moorpark Street, Sherman Oaks, CA. (818) 430 -1906, goldenmokeyhealing.com

Matt Schwartz is teaching a weekend workshop, Churning of the Shadow Warrior, September 12 - 13 at Exhale, 245 South Main Street, Venice, CA. (310) 450 - 7676, exhalespa.com

To learn more about Shadow Yoga, visit: shadowyoga.com.

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