



A Spiritual Odyssey

RINA ORTIZ TELLS BETTINA R OLMEDO HOW IYENGAR YOGA BROUGHT HER TO A PATH LEADING TO PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING IN AN AGE OF OBSESSION WITH MATERIAL ACQUISITIONS

IT IS SAID THAT ONE'S LIFE can either be a journey or a pilgrimage. For Rina Ortiz, life has always been a pilgrimage, as she continues her spiritual quest. Since she was eight, her young mind has been filled with questions.

"Why do bad things happen to good people? If God is really good, why does He allow awful things to happen on earth, like floods and earthquakes?" Having been educated in Catholic schools (Poveda for grade school and Assumption for high school), Ortiz was taught that evil was the consequence of man's sins.

Ortiz was never satisfied with simple explanations. Thus, in her twenties, she embarked on a spiritual odyssey, looking for the meaning of life. She persisted in this quest, even as she earned a degree in hotel and restaurant management in Les Roches, Switzerland, and worked in that country for the next four years. Her search continued when she came back to the Philippines and became manager of the former La Tasca.

Even after she fell in love with and married banker Tito Ortiz, she knew deep within that a wife could not expect her husband to complete her persona. "We've got to be whole first. I was convinced that peace, happiness and contentment could only come from within." A deeply spiritual person, Ortiz went to Mass every day, read inspirational books and attended regular prayer meetings. One day, as she was reading the Bible, she came across this passage, "God helps those who help themselves." Taking this quotation to heart, she decided to go into an intensive study of Eastern philosophy, including yoga.

At that time yoga was part of the spiritual renaissance of the "nurturing nineties." Although it has been around for some 5,000 years, yoga first became popular in the West only dur-

ing the "swinging sixties," practised by anti-Establishment hippies and New Age followers. Its recent rebirth in the new millennium was played up in the June 2007 issue of *Vanity Fair*, which featured international celebrities like Christy Turlington and Donna Karan singing its praises.

Ten years ago Ortiz attended her first yoga class, and from that moment on, life was never the same. She tried different types of yoga and, after two years, joined an Iyengar workshop in New York. Ortiz was convinced that this was what she had been looking for all along. In 2003, after studying with several other teachers, she finally underwent intensive training at the Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute in Pune, India, at the feet of the master himself, BKS Iyengar. The same year she opened the first Iyengar yoga centre in the Philippines, being the only Filipina who has been certified to teach this style of yoga.

The essence of Iyengar yoga was expressed by its founder in these words: "Your body must break into pieces for you to know the peace within." "The initial lessons involve a study of postures known as *asana*, and breath control known as *pranayama*," Ortiz explains. "However, it is wrong to assume that this kind of yoga is nothing but gymnastics and breathing exercises. Iyengar yoga is based on the premise that all human beings are a unified composite of body, mind and spirit. If we can develop full awareness of each part of our body by mastering the different postures, this will give us the key to exercising control over our mind. This is because everything in us is interconnected and interrelated."

Performing each *asana* requires full concentration and awareness of one's muscles and bones working together, Ortiz says. The pose is maintained for a few minutes to allow its effects to penetrate the human body, until the mind is also brought under control. Props like belts, bolsters, wooden blocks, flannel blankets, chairs and ropes help the students perform the various poses.

FACTS

AT A GLANCE

FAMILY LIFE

Married to Justo "Tito" Ortiz, chairman and CEO, Union Bank

CHILDREN

Katarina, 13
Antonio, 10

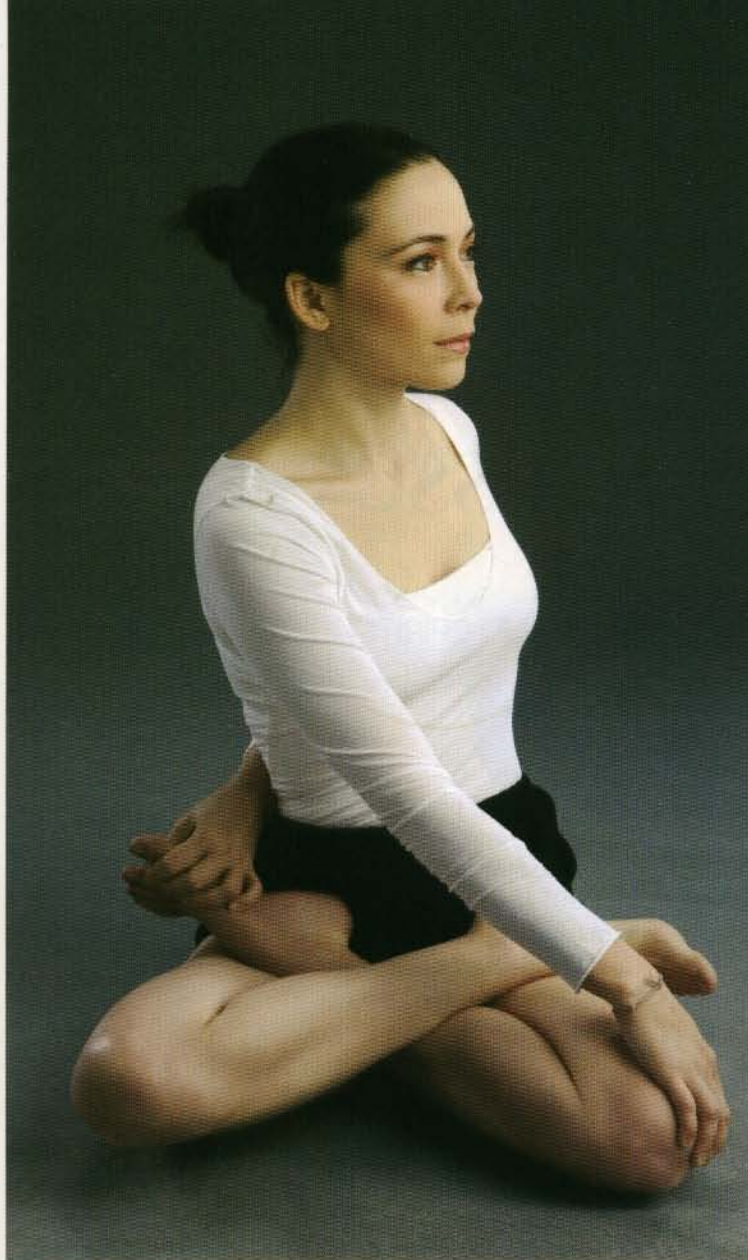
ACHIEVEMENT

The only Filipina certified to teach Iyengar Yoga

NAME OF SCHOOL

Iyengar Yoga Centre Manila
Address: 21st floor, LKG Tower, 6801 Ayala Ave., Makati City
Telephone: +632-753-4495 or +63917-535-9711

FACES



Yoga practice completes Rina Ortiz's day

a woman attending my class who could do this, and would you believe she's already 70?"

This is why many doctors and scientists who believe in alternative medicine allegedly acknowledge that the practice of yoga has therapeutic effects. It can eliminate aches and pains as well as improve posture.

Under the supervision of an experienced teacher, Iyengar yoga can also help alleviate some ailments. After a good practise session, Ortiz says, it's as if the whole body has been rinsed and wrung, freed from all its toxins and impurities. In Ortiz's own class, there are students with high blood pressure, sciatica, migraines and even depression who have considerably benefited from her lessons.

Ortiz recounts how the experience of one of her friends has convinced her that the benefits of Iyengar yoga transcend the purely physical. This friend had been suffering from clinical depression, which prevented her from functioning normally, and was on the antidepressant drug Prozac. Encouraged by Ortiz, she attended Iyengar yoga classes, and after a year was fully cured of her depression. She remains off the medication, and is now a

regular practitioner.

Ortiz is happy that she is now sharing the blessings of Iyengar yoga with others. Nevertheless, she knows that her spiritual journey is far from over. She devotes two hours each day to her yoga practice. She remains a practising Catholic, emphasising that one doesn't have to convert to Hinduism to be able to practise yoga seriously.

"Just like Catholicism, Iyengar yoga also maintains that the body is the temple of your soul. The Commandments affirm this belief in the importance of the human body: Love your neighbour as you love yourself, because within your neighbour is another Jesus." Ortiz herself still goes on retreats and seeks regular spiritual direction.

Such a rich inner life cannot but be reflected in a woman's demeanour and outlook. Ortiz exudes an ethereal aura that seems to emanate from the core of her being. Yet, she says, every day still poses a challenge. "All I know is that I always try to live each moment to the fullest. We are here on earth to help other people. I do believe that that is what life is all about. One day I hope to find the sense of peace and balance that I'm still searching for." One can't help believing that she is on the right track. ■

"We've got to be whole first. Peace and hapiness and contentment come from within"

When a student has mastered the *asana*, then he learns *pranayama*. These breathing exercises activate the internal organs, strengthening the body's nervous, circulatory and respiratory systems and producing a sense of calm. With constant practice, one experiences what Ortiz calls "meditation in motion," which empowers a person to be fully aware only of the present moment, unmindful of any external distraction.

"When you perform *sirsasana*, or headstand, for example, the effects on the human body are tremendous. There is a temporary surge of blood to your brain, and your heart starts beating in a different way. By practising Iyengar yoga, you are really pushing your body to its limits, and eventually you gain better control over it. The kind of physical endurance that I've described has nothing to do with age. There was