

Getting the Day Off to a Good Start

Captain G. R. Gopinath, founder of India's first budget airline, talks about how yoga transformed his life.

Interview by ANNA DUBROVSKY

More than sitting in meditation, I've always liked to take walks in the countryside. A large part of my life was spent in the Himalayas as an artillery officer in the army. I used to go for treks and walks. I felt it was the perfect way of meditating. After I left the army, I went home to my farm, and I lived there for 10 years in a tent. It was five miles to the nearest village. I'd walk those five miles from my farm.

After that, I moved to Bangalore and got into business. My helicopter business became the largest air charter company in India, and then I started the airline. On the one hand, the joy of creating a business, jobs, wealth was there. But on a personal level, I was shouting, screaming, running all the time. My life was so hectic. My friend used to say, "You're like a blue-assed fly." Zoom zoom zoom zoom.

I still took walks in the morning. One day I was walking, and behind a bush, I

saw a man in *shirshasana* (headstand), oblivious to the world. I stood there for about 15 minutes. He'd fold his legs, turn his legs, bend his legs—but he was on his head! For about a month, I would watch him doing yoga. I was curious. There was something about him that captivated me because he was totally involved with what he was doing. Finally one day I walked up to him and asked, "Who are you?"

He said that he worked in a factory, packaging. As a child laborer—when he

was 13 or 14—he came down with a disease. Somebody told him in the factory, "Maybe if you do yoga, you'll be cured." So he took to yoga, and got cured. And his relentless pursuit of yoga began.

I said to him, "Look, I don't think you should be working in a factory. You should be a yoga teacher. Can you come to my house and teach me?" This was about four or five years ago. He said yes.

He started teaching my wife and me. Every morning, Monday to Friday, he comes at 6:45. At 7:00 we start, and we finish about 8:15 or 8:30. After yoga, I read the papers, have a cup of coffee, and then walk to work.

I found that even on days when I went to sleep at 2:00 in the morning after a dinner meeting, if I had done yoga, I would always feel better. I could feel a spring in my step. My mind would be light. It kept

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CAPTAIN G. R. GOPINATH Soldier, farmer, founder of an airline—and yoga practitioner.

me totally energized for the whole day.

The biggest thing was that it helped me during my travels. I travel two or three days a week, some weeks four or five days. This year I made about five trips to New York. On each trip I was there for only one day, but I traveled for two days. If I landed at 8:00 in the morning and had a meeting at 11:00, I would do an hour of yoga. It kept me physically and mentally alert. So I continue it to this day. It has transformed my life in ways I never imagined it would. +

Captain G. R. Gopinath, known as "Captain Gopi," is the founder and managing director of Deccan Aviation Ltd. The company operates Air Deccan, India's first low-cost, no-frills airline. He was a captain in the Indian army and a farmer whose eco-friendly approach to raising silkworms earned him the Rolex Award for Enterprise in 1996. He lives in Bangalore.