



An American Yoga: The Kripalu Story

James Abro

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In 1960, a young man named Amrit Desai traveled from India to the United States to study art at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia. Leaving his wife and infant son in India, Desai arrived with 600 dollars, and no bank account. A decade later, Yogi Amrit Desai, reunited with his family, founded the Yoga Society of Pennsylvania, and established a spiritual community (Ashram) and Yoga Retreat. The Yoga Society offered yoga classes, teacher training, and holistic health services/programs. Later that same year Yogi Desai developed a new practice of yoga which he named Kripalu Yoga, after his original Indian guru, Shrii Kripalvanandji. Kripalu Yoga and the health services offered became so popular, that in 1980, in need of larger quarters, the community moved to the Berkshire Hills. The Kripalu Center for Yoga & Health was established on the former estate of Andrew Carnegie, in Lenox, Massachusetts. By the early 1990s, The Kripalu Center was the largest and most successful yoga-based enterprise of its kind in the world. The Yoga Journal called the Kripalu Center, "The standard bearer for integrity and professionalism in programs and services." In 1994, under a cloud of controversy, Yogi Amrit Desai was asked to resign as the center's spiritual director. James Abro visited the original retreat in Pennsylvania, while on assignment from a national magazine, to write an article on "alternative healthy holiday destinations". Little did he know that the assignment would have a lasting effect on his entire life.

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