



## Dewachenbo (Dechen) Thurman

Positive energy and a holistic approach to life guide this fun-loving yogi through blissful days

by Tess Ghilaga

**W**hen your name translated from Tibetan means *Buddha's Bliss Universe*, you have a lot to live up to. But the 6' 2" Dechen, as he is commonly known, does it with mindful intention. As the son of Robert A.F. Thurman, the esteemed Jey Tsong Khapa scholar of Indo-Tibetan Studies at Columbia University, Dechen's childhood in Amherst, Massachusetts, was far from typical. His youth, spent harboring Cambodian refugees, protesting nuclear power plants, and writing letters to free political prisoners, opened his eyes to social activism. Yet as globally aware as Thurman was, his personal gift for touch trumped everything else. As a child, he would rub his mother's feet for allowance money while watching *The Cosby Show*.

As an actor and model during his teens and 20s in New York, Dechen began practicing yoga at Jivamukti. "The chanting and study of Sanskrit led me back to my background in Tibetan Buddhism," says Thurman, who bears a striking resemblance to his sister, actress Uma Thurman. Becoming a yoga practitioner enhanced his ongoing pursuit of shiatsu massage and inspired his studies at the Ohashi Institute, where he eventually became a distinguished instructor.

Last year, after becoming certified as a Jivamukti

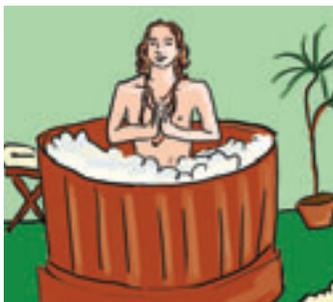
yoga teacher, Thurman began sharing his Indo-Tibetan insights with his devoted, growing group of students who attend his classes. Whether leading a yoga class or giving Ohashi Shiatsu, Thurman's holistic healing abilities give weary New Yorkers a positive energetic lift.

Here's how a typical day in his life goes:

**6:30 am:** Wakes up and prepares a wholesome breakfast of green tea and oatmeal with maple syrup. Meditates for 20 minutes.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY MORGAN JOHNSON



**8 am:** Takes a hot bath and chants in the tub. "It's like singing in the shower, but you get the vibration of the water," Dechen says.

**8:30 am:** Walks to the Jivamukti Yoga School

**8:40 am:** Stops by Matthew Kenney's Jivamuktea, the 100% vegan café within Jivamukti and orders a Third Eye Smoothie (Mango with Young Coconut and Vanilla)

**8:55 am:** Changes into his teaching clothes, which are usually a red shirt and Jivamukti pink yoga pants. "It's the color of transformation and laughter," notes Thurman.



**9 am:** Programs his musical selections for the class to synchronize with the asana sequence. Tunes from East and West, sung by male and female, echo throughout the space, including Stevie Wonder's *You Are the Sunshine of My Life*, songs from Gabrielle Roth, and the Ganesh Mantra. During Savasana, it's always an instrumental, which promotes complete surrender.

**9:05 am:** The one-hour, 35-minute class begins. Mantras, chanting, and Alternate Nostril breathing grounds the class in the present. Thurman assists his beginner students in asanas without making them feel picked on or ignoring the advanced practitioners. During class, he'll share some inspiration about Jivamukti's focus of the month, such as taking yoga to the next level, fostering spiritual activation, and activism. Thurman offers neck massages to students in Savasana, infused with lavender massage lotion. At the conclusion of class, he makes himself available to students with questions or to demonstrate poses.



**11-2 pm:** Changes into his "gi," the all-white ensemble he wears to see clients for Ohashiatsu massage. Named after its founder, Japanese-born Ohashi, the method concentrates on the communication between the giver and receiver of

the bodywork. ([www.ohashiatsu.org](http://www.ohashiatsu.org))

The massage brings the mind/body/spirit into harmony by stimulating the acupressure points, relaxing the tense muscles, and toning the weak muscles. "It gives the person the awareness that they have everything they need to be healthy," explains Dechen.

**2:15 pm:** Back to Jivamuktea for a taste of some vegan-style comfort food, called The Muse—grilled soy gouda sandwich and a root chakra smoothie. "It's solid," he enthuses about his hearty lunch.

**4 pm:** Takes an open-level yoga class



**6:30 pm:** Meets with his brother, Ganden, executive director of Tibet House ([www.tibethouse.org](http://www.tibethouse.org)), to discuss upcoming programs at the cultural and spiritual center co-founded by his father. Forthcoming plans include the creation of a yoga and bodywork network available to veterans of the Iraq war who are suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

**8 pm:** A dinner date at Tsampa, a Tibetan restaurant on East 9th Street in the East Village



**9:30 pm:** Takes in some live music at the legendary Bitter End, the city's oldest rock club in Greenwich Village.

**11:30 pm:** Before going to bed, Thurman lights some incense and sits in reflection. "I think about good things," he says. "If there's something I'm worried about, I try going to sleep with a question mark instead of a period." 🙏