

# Super CrossFit issue

# MEN'S FITNESS

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### SMASH HIS KILLER PROGRAM

### PUB GRUB

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BETTER THAN  
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### MUDDY HELL!

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### BUDDHIST BOOTCAMP

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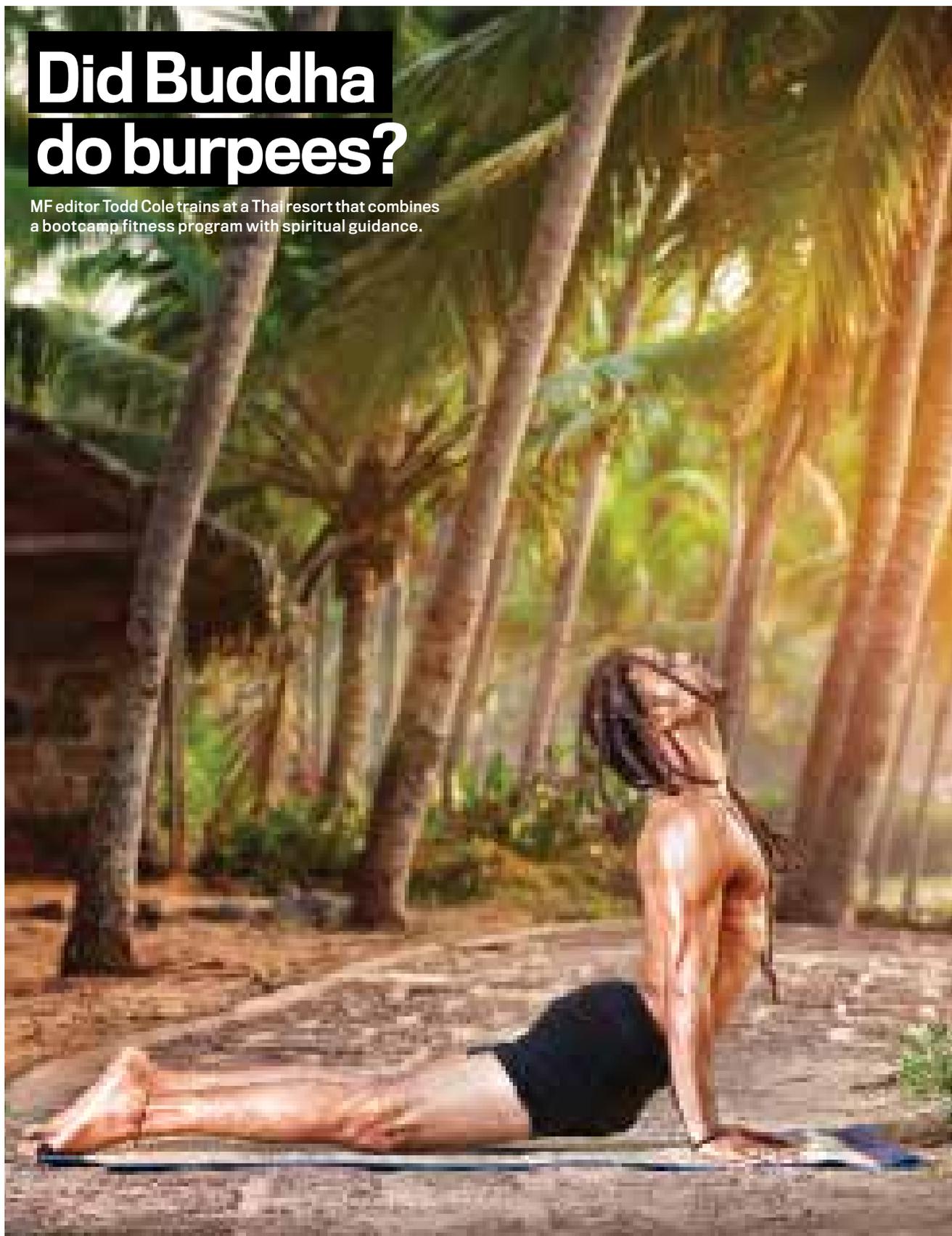


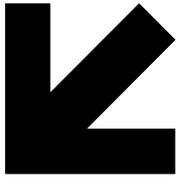
Mensfitnessmagazine.com.au

JULY 2017 \$8.50

# Did Buddha do burpees?

MF editor Todd Cole trains at a Thai resort that combines a bootcamp fitness program with spiritual guidance.





I think Buddha did do burpees. Lots of them, every day. It's my theory because there's this curious practice in Buddhism today where the practitioner moves his clasped hands from head to neck to heart, then kneels before laying flat on his stomach, hands extended in front. Then he reverses this move to a standing position before repeating. It's not uncommon for Buddhists to do 30 "sets" of 30 "reps" during the course of a day's worship.

Called a "prostration", it looks for all the world like a slow burpee. It's not, of course. It's a devotional gesture used to show reverence and is believed to invoke veneration and purity, and nix conceit.

I did a few days of these prostrations once for another story, and while I wasn't enlightened, a strange calm descended upon me; a calm I've only felt with experiences like intense multi-day fitness events, long treks or killer workouts.

The process got me thinking about exercise, fitness and how they tie into spirituality. The East seems to connect all three together and increasingly this approach is creeping into Western training regimes. Most Eastern martial arts incorporate some element of deference to a higher purpose and devout humility.

Bruce Lee's quasi-spiritual quotes and memes pepper the interwebs. Mindfulness and meditation are the new tools in high-end sports coaching. At its most pure, yoga, the go-to cross-training regime for countless athletes, is a meditative practice grounded in

spirituality. On the dietary front, fasting, now a proven weight-loss regime, features heavily in Buddhism. In fact, the Buddha is reputed to have said: "I do not eat a meal in the evening. Not eating a meal in the evening I, monks, am aware of good health..." Buddha, it appears, was on the now famous 5:2 Intermittent Fasting diet way before it became a bestseller.

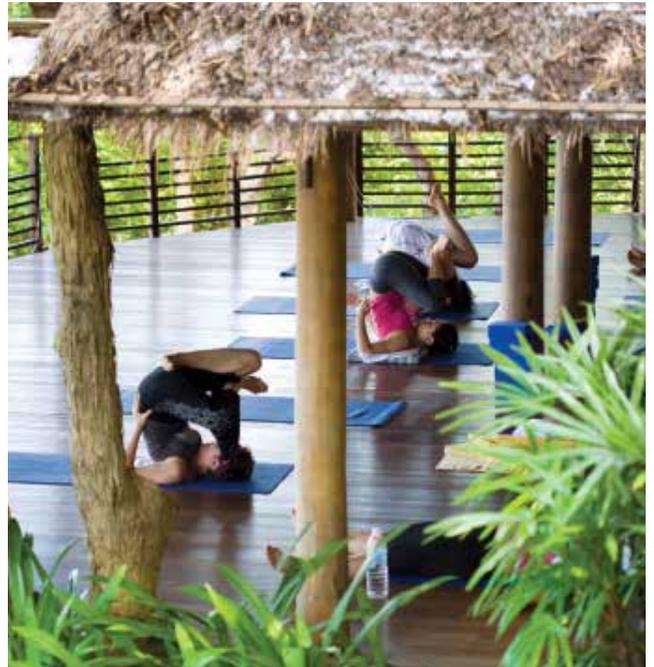
To get a better handle on the whole concept of spirituality and fitness, I travelled to a resort on Koh Samui that I'd heard employed a fitness program combined with spiritual guidance.

Koh Samui is a touristy tropical island off the coast of Thailand. Forty minutes from the airport, past gun ranges, countless girlie bars and moped hire shops, sits Kamalaya. At first blush, it looks like any upmarket Asian resort. It's leafy and luxurious and backs on to a beach so idyllic if a unicorn trotted out of the jungle surrounded by golden butterflies, you wouldn't be surprised.

Kamalaya bills itself as a wellness resort offering

detox and stress management programs, weight loss and yoga retreats to the well-heeled of the world. It won "Worldwide Health & Wellness Destination of the Year" recently at the World Spa & Wellness Awards. It has also picked up Spafinder Wellness Travel Awards 2016: Best in Asia and Condé Nast Traveller Spa Awards 2016: Best Destination Spa. No small feat.

Recently it began offering a comprehensive fitness program with everything from Thai boxing and HIIT to yoga and bespoke strength training as well as nutritional guidance. The program is combined with twice-daily massages,



Kamalaya health resort offers everything from yoga to HIIT and Thai boxing.

a delicious, super-clean menu and a few long chats with a former Hindu monk about, well, life's purpose, fitness and personal goals. Indeed, Kamalaya's founder, John Stewart, lived in an Ashram in Nepal for 16 years studying under Babaji, a Himalayan master teacher.

I'd booked into the Comprehensive Optimal Fitness program. I was weighed, checked, measured and quizzed before beginning my first session with a little Thai guy who called himself Frank.

Kamalaya has a gym

complex that'd give any fitness nut a boner. But Frank didn't need any of that shiny new equipment. Just a 10kg dumbbell, and a Swiss ball. Sixty minutes later, Frank wore a classic Thai smile — I was in a puddle of sweat on the mat gasping for gas like a freshly-landed fish!

It was the end of the second day I met my spiritual mentor. Rajesjh was called the "Blackberry Monk". Before he studied ancient Asian philosophies for 14 years he was a very successful chartered accountant in charge of several large businesses.

Rajesjh sat cross-legged and stared into my soul. I asked why most people in the West couldn't achieve their fitness goals. He paused and considered the question.

"For exercise to be beneficial and successful long-term, the body, mind and spirit must be connected to the exercise," he replied. "The body is simply the machine, the mind is being present to goals and needs, and the spirit is awareness.



"Spirituality is attention. Through attention comes a space of happiness. If you are happy, you will not quit. Most people in the West can't connect all three.

"First, they neglect the spirit. Then they lose the mind and finally, they are just a body performing a repetitive, boring task. So they quit."

I nodded, said, "Yes, I see" a lot and pretended I understood what he was talking about. It rattled around my brain the next day during yoga, laps in the pool, and a 90-minute massage. But it didn't click. Surely, sticking to a fitness regime was simply a matter of self-discipline. What did spirituality have to do with it?

I thought I'd flick the question to John Stewart. John was a yogi monk who, reversing Rajesjh's life course, started as a

hippie in the '70s then became a successful businessman and is now a world-renowned art dealer.

He responded in an email: "The modern Western approach to physical fitness did not emerge from holistic understanding. In fact, coming from modern science, it has, like medicine, been separated into specialties not necessarily connected to each other. Our bodies and minds have been divided into individual unconnected parts... Eastern philosophical traditions see all life as an integrated whole where exercise is a part of the path to wisdom, personal growth and transformation."

Transformation. Personal growth. Like many of you I suspect, I have these in spades thanks to a lifelong pursuit of exercise. I was still confused.



**"Eastern tradition sees life as an integrated whole where exercise is a part of the path to wisdom."**

The days followed a pattern of training bliss: work out, eat clean, massage, repeat. Sleep.

The week-long program was well-varied and interesting, the PT's knowledgeable and inspiring, and the property an instagram junkie's wet dream. But Rajesjh's words were a riddle that continued to haunt me.

Just before I met him again, I did a session of kickboxing — a cherished pastime of mine. My instructor, all 65kg of him, could have disassembled my 88kg frame easily, but like all the experts at Kamalaya, his approach was fun and friendly.

I worked my heart out on kicks and sparring, finally delivering some crushing blows to the bag. I began laughing with pure joy. So did my trainer. It was genuine fun. Time slipped away and the idea of quitting never crossed my mind. When my trainer called time, I had burnt over 800 Calories and my EPOC [rate of oxygen intake] was through the roof.

I wanted to do it again,

but had to meet Rajesjh.

I sat with him and confessed I didn't understand what he meant about spirituality and fitness. He asked: "When do you love training?"

I reflected on my kickboxing session: "When I'm right into it." "That is awareness," Rajesjh responded. "When your mind is in the present, in the now, and not wishing it was over. And why do you train?"

"To keep my weight under control, plus I want to live to an old age."

"Both very good goals," he observed. Silence.

"And I guess," I continued, "I want to be an example to my twin boys and teenage girl. I want them to understand health and fitness..."

Rajesjh sat back, with a "there-you-go" flourish of his hands.

Have you ever had an "ah-ha" moment? A split second where you wanted to laugh out loud because

you suddenly got it?

I did then. It wasn't that complex.

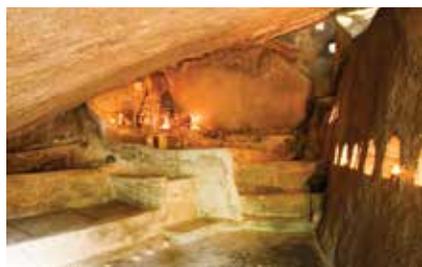
Looking back over my life, I thought about when I'd enjoyed training the most, and when I'd been successful.

It was the times I'd had a goal and was doing it for someone else: helping an overweight mate/client shed lard; training with a buddy for a race; raising cash for a charity run; wanting my kids to feel proud of their dad.

If fitness has a higher purpose that's important to you, then you'll never quit. It might be for the love of your children, mates, the less fortunate or your country. If you're training for something greater than yourself, you'll never train harder.

Back in Australia, I reread an email from John: "In the East, there is an understanding that we human beings are a part of something much larger than ourselves..."

It made sense. n



For more information on Koh Samui-based luxury health resort Kamalaya, go to [kamalaya.com](http://kamalaya.com).