

Rap mogul reaps benefits from meditation regimen

Written by Kam Williams



Master entrepreneur and visionary Russell Simmons has influenced virtually all aspects of business and media: in music with the cofounding of the immensely successful Def Jam Recordings; in the fashion industry with the trailblazing Phat Pharm, Baby Phat, Run Athletics, and Def Jam University clothing lines; in television with HBO's Def Comedy Jam and Russell Simmons Presents Def Poetry; on Broadway with the Tony Award-winning stage production Russell Simmons Def Poetry Jam; in digital with All Def Digital, All Def Music, and Narrative; as well as numerous other ventures in the financial services industry, mobile communications, and philanthropy.

A native New Yorker currently residing in Los Angeles, Mr. Simmons is the proud father of two daughters. Here, he talks about his new book: *Success through Stillness: Meditation Made Simple*.

Kam Williams: Hi Rush, thanks for the time.

Russell Simmons: My man, how you feel?

KW: Great! How about you brother?

RS: I'm doing fine. I'm still moving around, Kam. I'm in Texas at the South by Southwest Music Festival announcing All Def Digital's partnership with Samsung. We're building a platform to put a song out every week for 52 weeks called ADD52.

KW: Why'd you start All Def Digital?

RS: To give all this black talent a chance by exposing them to Hollywood, which is very segregated. Hollywood is full of very liberal people, but it still has an infrastructure that needs to be broken. So, my idea is to integrate black stars into mainstream stars. It hasn't been explored properly. That's what I'm doing in Hollywood. And that's what All Def Digital is doing. I'm probably going to shoot TV 10 pilots this year.

KW: Any ideas you care to share at this point?

RS: One's a detective show for J.B. Smoove. Another's a remake of a classic black movie that would star Chris Tucker. And I have a pilot called The Re-Education of Oliver Cooper starring the white kid from Project X where follows a black girl to a black university, like in Legally Blonde. I have so many fun projects. Another one, written by the guy from Friday [DJ Pooh], has kids from Compton growing weed in a house in Bel Air.

KW: Recently, Ride Along, did very well, despite its having a black principal cast. It was #1 at the box-office a few weeks in a row.

RS: Yeah, but 86% of its audience was made up of people of color. That tells you that the full potential of many black stars won't be realized until their audiences are fully integrated. No one wants to sell to just 12% of the population for the entire length of their careers. It creates a difficult and less-profitable environment. But Hollywood has lived with that limiting mantra, and only a few black stars have managed to break through. It's a whole world which needs to be changed. Fortunately, Hollywood is open to change. It's just a question of how to go about doing it.

KW: Good luck with that. Let's talk about your new book. AALBC's Troy Johnson asks: How long have you been practicing meditation and how has it helped you?

RS: 20 years. Sitting in stillness has got to be the greatest asset I have in terms of attaining happiness. Nothing increases happiness like quiet time. The truth is, the only moments that make you laugh or happy are seconds of stillness. At the shock of a joke, everything disappears but the present moment. When you read a book, and it's really, really beautiful, you're so engaged you forget to breathe. If you're in a car accident, and everything moves slowly, you can be shocked into the present. The past and the future disappear. Here's another great example. If you play basketball, you get into the zone. You can't miss. That's the expansive mindset we're all seeking. But that only comes when the mind is quiet and separate from the noise. And the greatest tool to eliminate the noise is meditation.

KW: Environmental activist Grace Sinden says: With people connected increasingly to their "apps" and the 24-hour cycle of often-disturbing news, it is more necessary than ever to have quiet and Stillness in our lives. She asks: Did you write this book somewhat as a reaction to the noisy, always-connected culture we live in?

RS: The always-connected culture isn't as much a contributor as Grace might think. The nervous mind, the monkey mind, will create its own noise. It doesn't need a new toy. Sometimes, a new toy, a new technology, will focus you. The world is always trying to draw you out, so you always have to remember to go in. I didn't write this book in reaction to the 24-hour news cycle, because "be still and know" has been taught for thousands of years before the development of this technology. The research shows that

if you meditate, the mind becomes still, and they can see the functionality and gray matter in the brain increase, the nervous system calm, the immune system improve and a reduction in stress. So, quiet time is the key. We have hundreds of thousands of kids around the country meditating through the David Lynch Foundation. What I want to do with this book, and I'm giving all the profits to charity, is to teach people to meditate. All it takes is a little bit of patience. It's a simple guide. And the more people meditate, the more it increases the positive vibrations turning the planet into a positive, happy place. The more you do that, the greater service you are to God. I introduced Oprah and Ellen to their TM [Transcendental Meditation] teachers. They both thanked me, and spoke publicly about it, which is great because they can spread the word. Ellen has been a great supporter. Russell Brand has done the same. I've shared meditation with a lot of hip-hop artists, inmates, and returning war veterans with PTSD, as well. I feel like this dharma, this service is part of my job.

KW: Attorney Bernadette Beekman gives a shout out from a fellow Hollis native!

She asks: What were you most astonished to discover as a result of meditating?

RS: Coming out of my first yoga class, I was astonished that there were nothing but hot girls there. Just 55 girls, Bobby Shriver, who's a buddy of mine, and myself. I came out of class, I was so high. I been sober 26 years, but I'm an ex-druggie. I want to talk a little bit about two things: clarity and cloudiness. Both of them quiet the mind. One quiets it, the other numbs it. either way, there's less thought, and the less thought, the more happiness. And when the mind is totally still, there's only bliss. I got a piece of that reality from my first yoga class, from smiling and breathing in every difficult pose. I went, "Oh my God! I'm clear! I love this!" If I keep doing this, I'm going to give away my money. But a more happy mind leads to quietness and clarity. And that clarity helps you have a greater capacity to do more and to become more successful and more giving. So, running all my different companies has turned out to be a lot easier because I meditate twice a day and go to yoga every day.

KW: Bernadette also says: I sat a 10-day Vipassana course many years ago and afterwards, I was encouraged by a film called Doing Time, Doing Vipassana which was about meditation courses offered in prisons. The results were very encouraging. She asks: What do you think of meditation methods taught to prisoners?

RS: I think it's very important. I've gone into prisons to meditate with inmates. It's something I plan to do with Tim Robbins soon. I owe him a call about that.

KW: Bernadette asks: If you could focus all of your resources to solve one problem in our society, what one would it be?

RS: At the core of everything that is hurtful to humanity is a lack of consciousness. Unconscious behavior is at the core. Think of the 40 billion animals we abuse and eat who are born into suffering. It's a karmic disaster. An animal products diet is like smoking 20 cigarettes a day. What I would do to change this planet is have everyone meditate and look inside. Then we'd have a happier, more service-oriented, less-needy world.

KW: Editor Lisa Loving says this book looks great. I know a crabby person whose life changed

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when he started meditating. She asks: Are there ever limits to an individual's ability to follow your advice? Are there certain kinds of stress, difficulty or even grief that is so staggering that it becomes impossible to cope with through meditation?

RS: Meditation helps everything, Lisa. But I couldn't guarantee that someone could get off their medication. But I suspect that meditation instead of Ritalin would change the life of any kid with ADD.

KW: Editor/legist Patricia Turnier says: Some people are reluctant to try psychotherapy. They will instead deal with their stress and pain by taking drugs and/or alcohol. Do you think that meditation can be beneficial to them?

RS: Absolutely, because when you sit quietly and look inside, things that seem so difficult on the outside become a lot easier to digest. Concerns that might've caused a lot of anxiety just come and go. That happens to me everyday. I watch my thoughts, not only on the mat, but all through the day.

KW: Troy Johnson asks: Are you happy about how hip-hop has evolved over the past 40 years?

RS: It hasn't changed that much at all, actually. It's been great. It keeps getting better in some ways.

KW: Troy says: Many music fans think that the best hip-hop music is being produced by underground artists. Are there any you're excited about?

RS: At All Def Digital we're developing tons of them.

KW: Larry Greenberg asks: Have you and the artists you work with benefited from the turmoil in the music industry?

RS: I don't see it.

KW: Professor Hisani Dubose has a couple of questions for her music technology majors at Bloomfield College. How has the internet changed the music industry? What do artists have to do these days to get a record deal?

RS: You don't need a record deal. You'll have the industry begging for you, when you build your buzz. I signed Jay-Z because he was on fire. I wasn't a genius. The record was great. I put it on The Nutty Professor soundtrack and we signed him. People build themselves up before you even have to deal with them. It's always marketeers building their own careers. Nowadays, if you're a great artist, you don't have to leave the house, which is a really big difference. You're closer to the artist. And the artist can be closer to their artistry without having to always worry about branding themselves or building something image-wise.

KW: The music maven Heather Covington question: What was the last song you listened to?

RS: "My Nigga" by YG.

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/B00F74N5Q0/ref=nosim/thslfofire-20>

I probably shouldn't even say that, because everybody gets mad. But it is my favorite record. I was just listening to it in the car. I live in hip-hop. I don't find it to be offensive. I know there's a debate about it. I probably shouldn't say this to national black

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distribution, but they have to live with it, too. They ain't gonna change young people. All they're going to do is make 'em say it more. That particular YG record is the biggest record, and I like it. That's not helpful, is it? It's the truth. I'm a full disclosure kind of person. Another song I just listened to was "Mere Gurudev," a devotional record by Krishna Das.

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/B004PUYE8U/ref=nosim/thslfofire-20>

KW: The bookworm Troy Johnson question: What was the last book you read?

RS: I read "The Yoga Sutras" every day. <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1938477073/ref=nosim/thslfofire-20>

And also the "The Bhagavad Gita." <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1586380192/ref=nosim/thslfofire-20>

Those two books sit by my bed. And I'm currently reading "The China Study."
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1932100660/ref=nosim/thslfofire-20>

KW: When you look in the mirror, what do you see?

RS: different reflections at different times. I really, really try to be a good servant. It makes me happy when I'm a good giver without expectations.

KW: What are you up to next?

RS: The main thing is I'll be going to Chicago to work with [Mayor] Rahm Emmanuel to put meditation in the schools.

KW: Thanks again for the interview, Rush, and best of luck with the book, the TV shows, and the meditation initiative.

RS: It's a great pleasure as always talking with you, Kam.

To order a copy of Success through Stillness, visit:

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1592408656/ref%3dnosim/thslfofire-20>