

GET YOUR BEST BODY

fitness



It's smiles all around for devotees of intenSati.

This woman wants to

PUMP YOU UP!

She yells affirmations while you do the hard work. Find out why Patricia Moreno is changing New Yorkers' lives.

At Summer Kicks gym in East Hampton, a dedicated crew of toned moms and hot young guys are waiting with bated breath. Finally, the instructor, Patricia Moreno, a 43-year-old native of San Jose, Calif., moves to the front of the room. A soundtrack of ethnic chanting kicks in as the group, as if in a trance, begins to follow Patricia in a series of movements as they repeat her declarations. “I believe I will succeed,” they intone together. “I am great!” they yell. “I am a warrior.”

This is intenSati, a workout that has caught on with health-conscious New Yorkers and self-help junkies, and now has a cult-like following at 10 branches of Equinox in Manhattan. “Last fall we offered nine classes per week in the city,” says Carol Espel, national director of group fitness for Equinox. “This fall there will be 15. Members line up to get a spot. We are so worried about overcrowding during busy hours that we have moved some intenSati classes to non-prime time, and Patricia still fills them to capacity.” The popularity of intenSati has also spread nationwide, with classes already happening in California and others about to start in Miami and Boston. Patricia’s teacher-training program has nearly 100 instructors spreading the intenSati gospel in locales as diverse as Sweden, Israel and Russia. In the last couple of years she has sold 100,000 intenSati DVDs, and more than 4,000 fans have joined her online community.

But intenSati is more than a business. Patricia’s New York following is quick to credit the regime with changing their lives. Brian Hathaway, a 36-year-old who left his job in finance to produce films and attends classes three times a week, says he owes his professional success to the workout. “If it wasn’t for intenSati, I wouldn’t be where I am now—on the cusp of a major film project,” Brian says. “Practicing has made me the spiritual rock of our company.” In fact, he has become so involved with the intenSati world, he is now dating Erika Shannon, one of the top instructors and—unsurprisingly—another zealot. “I was in a bad marriage and intenSati gave me the strength to get out of it,” Erika says. “When I started taking the class, I was moved to tears a lot because I never expected to find this kind of thing at the gym.”

IntenSati, (the name is a blend of “intention” plus “sati,” or “mindfulness” in Sanskrit) began as an experiment at a Greenwich Village Equinox in 2001, where Patricia was an aerobics teacher. “I was reading these spiritual texts, and I kept coming up with the concept that you are what you think you are. I decided I wanted to do a class of affirmations,” she says. So she developed an hour-long workout of yoga, martial arts moves and self-help catchphrases. “I’m sometimes afraid to describe the class,” says Patricia. “As soon as I get to the part about the affirmations, I can see that some people have this preconceived negative idea.”



“There are girls who are not married and feel they aren’t worthwhile. This class attacks that and empowers them.”

The class certainly wasn’t an instant success. “At the beginning the response was, ‘I like the exercise, but she talks too much,’” Patricia recalls. “Even the gym’s management told me the students wanted less talking. But people loved the physical workout, and soon the spiritual end started seeping in, and they began talking out loud.” IntenSati classes begin with a controlled warm-up of stretching and bending, while everyone repeats mantras like “As above, so is below, this is what I know” and “Every day in a very true way, I co-create my reality.” It moves on to a more frantic cardio section of boxing and aerobics moves, lunges and yoga poses, all accompanied by Patricia’s dialogue.

These days intenSati has become a religion in the city. Keri Nadler, a 25-year-old Upper West Sider, stumbled into a class at Equinox months ago, and has since quit her job as an actor’s agent and signed up for intenSati teacher training. “I thought it was weird at first, but at the end of class I found myself crying,” she says. “I didn’t go back right away, but that week things started to shift for me. It’s like a lightbulb went on. I had always depended on friends and family and suddenly I discovered my own backbone.”

Of course, not every gym-goer has been thrilled by the thought of chanting while lunging. When Natalia Petrzela, a 29-year-old certified intenSati teacher, stepped in as a substitute for another class, the reaction wasn’t entirely receptive. “As the class started, I said, ‘Bring your hands to your heart and ask yourself what you want,’” she says. “A woman yelled at the top of her lungs, ‘How about a real exercise class?’”

IntenSati instructors are used to hearing this kind of skepticism, but say the class gets results. “If you have to punch through the negative, then you do it,” says Patricia Grantham, who owns Summer Kicks, where she first introduced intenSati last summer. “There is a group of girls who come here who’ve hit that age where they are not married and they may be feeling like they aren’t worthwhile or don’t have life by the tail. I’ve seen it over and over again. This class attacks that problem and helps empower them.”

Men as well as women are devoted to intenSati. “It shifted the way I think,” says Demetre Daskalakis, a 34-year-old doctor who has been taking intenSati classes for the past two years, and this summer upped his commitment from one to three times a week. “I completely attribute a better attitude to that class. I’m not an athlete, but this mind over body thing—yelling ‘I’m strong’—I bought into it. I don’t know how much is physical and how much is mental, but my stamina and strength are greater.”

When asked about the class’s cult nature, and the obsession of her followers, Patricia takes a deep breath. “If somebody does get into it, they are in a state of meditation during the class, and they have this energy change,” she says, jet-black eyes twinkling. “They do get overexcited. But if you are going to get overexcited about something, this isn’t such a bad thing to get excited about.” —Beth Landman