BODHI SURF + YOGA ONLINE IMMERSION PROGRAM

8 SIMPLE LIMBS OF YOGA FOR A SIMPLE LIFE

A program focusing on the philosophy behind the practice of Yoga.

Bodhi SURF+YOGA

Bodhi
SURF+YOGA

Here at Bodhi Surf + Yoga, we offer a different kind of vacation than is considered typical: one that promotes responsible tourism, embraces the concept of community, and brings guests closer to nature in our small town of Bahia Ballena, Osa, Costa Rica.

Surfing is used as a tool to direct our guest's attention outward toward nature and the elements, while practicing yoga is meant to steer the guest's attention inward to the mind and the breath. Ultimately, these activities function synergistically in the cultivation of awareness — which, quite deliberately, is the meaning of the Sanskrit word "bodhi".

This model has proven to work quite well, as Bodhi Surf + Yoga was recently recognized as a “Best for the World” B Corporation in the Community category for the third year in a row. Furthermore, we are proud members of 1% for the Planet, voluntarily donating one percent of our gross annual sales to support environmental non-profits.

The intention of this yoga course is to learn about the eight limbs of yoga in the simplest way, so that we can easily understand them and see clearly how this information can be applicable in our daily lives and in the way we approach and treat others and all living creatures.

This subject is particularly fitting in the current times, which are so full of uncertainty and fear. We hope this program will bring peace amidst the chaos, and a more positive view of life. Thank you for joining us on this journey!

Sincerely,
The Bodhi Surf + Yoga Team

Certified B Corporation

1% FOR THE PLANET

CREST
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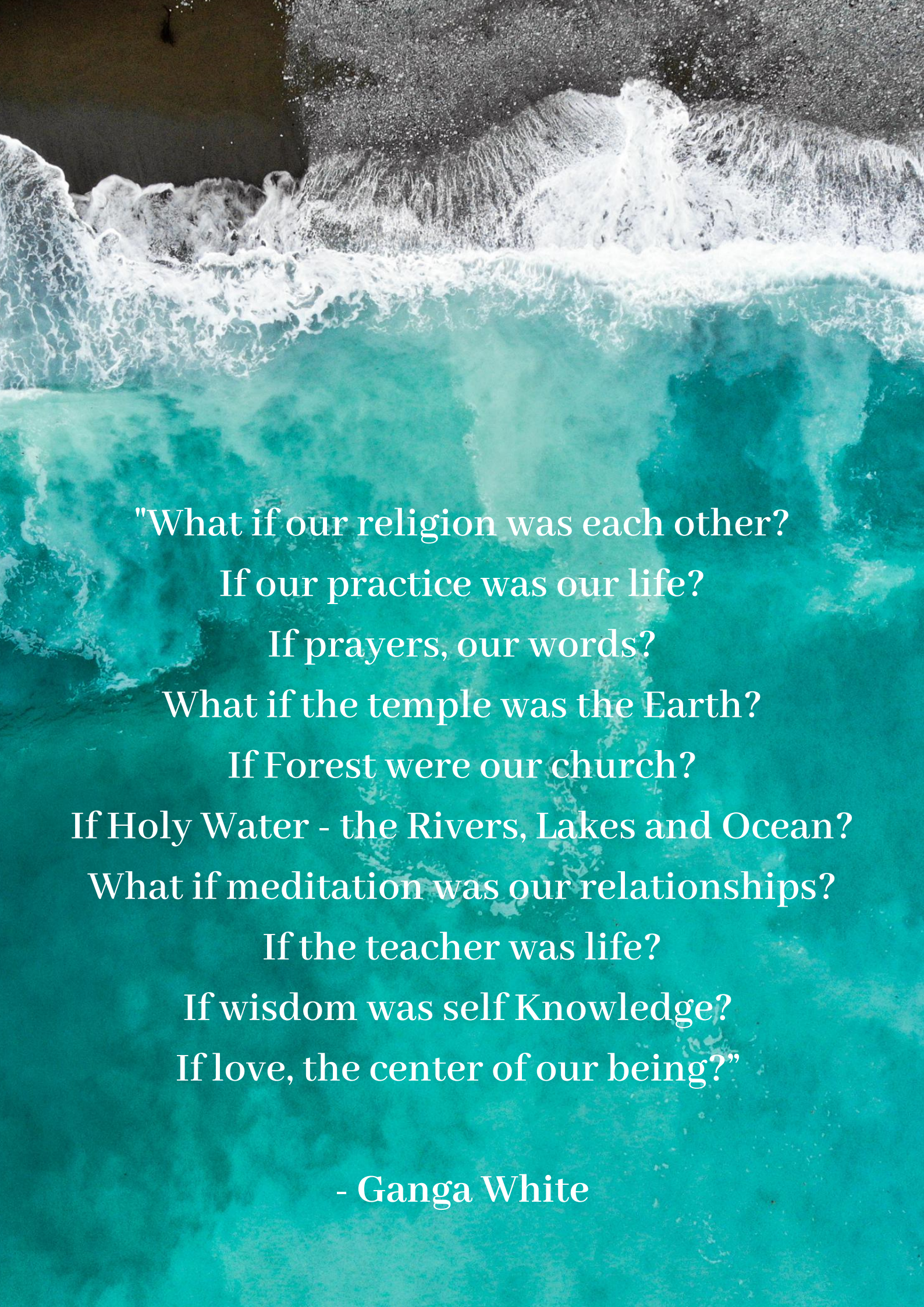
TRANSFORMATIONAL TRAVEL COUNCIL


"What if our religion was each other?
If our practice was our life?
If prayers, our words?
What if the temple was the Earth?
If Forest were our church?
If Holy Water - the Rivers, Lakes and Ocean?
What if meditation was our relationships?
If the teacher was life?
If wisdom was self Knowledge?
If love, the center of our being?”
- Ganga White

INTRODUCTION

"YOGA IS THE JOURNEY FROM THE HEAD TO THE HEART."

What are the eight limbs of Ashtanga Yoga and why are they important?

The eight-limbed system of yoga comes from The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, a key text of yoga philosophy that not only defines what yoga is, but provides a progressive and pragmatic path of guidelines and suggestions to help individuals **live a simpler, more meaningful life**.

The philosophy of yoga has some complexity to it. It is subject to our own individual interpretation and therefore requires time and attention to fully appreciate what is being said. These guidelines create a roadmap that, when diligently applied, **may lead to a deeper state of inner peace**. There is also freedom within the structure of the eightfold path, and although it suggests many universal principles, it also opens the door for us to find our own answers and pursue our own individual path.

In The Yoga Sutras, Patanjali outlines the following:

1. Yes, suffering exists.
2. There are identifiable, root causes of suffering.
3. And finally, there are simple techniques to continuously identify and better understand these root causes so that we can ultimately overcome them. This is where the eight limbs of Ashtanga yoga come into play ("Ashta" means eight, and "Anga" means limbs).

This framework presents a step by step process which we can return to time and again to deepen our understanding of the practice of yoga. Better yet, **it provides us with a toolbox full of practical changes that will help us embrace new ways of living or help us to reinforce positive patterns we already have**.

The eightfold path represents a progressive journey from the tangible outer world to the subtle inner world in a non-dogmatic, non-demanding, non-ritualistic fashion. Patanjali's recommendations are meant for trial and error, so take what works best for you based on your own true experiences.

From my perspective, these eight limbs of Ashtanga have the capacity to create magic in our lives; not in a whimsical way, but rather in a manner that is both **real and peaceful**. This framework asks us to do two main things: to surrender and let go of the many negative aspects to which we cling, and to utilize our bodies, minds, and energy as sacred tools to learn more about ourselves and grow in our spiritual path.

Maybe this is the aspect of the eight-limbed system that is the most attractive: there is no dogmatic method telling you exactly what to

do, how to think, how to act, or how to live your life; it doesn't ask you to follow a guru, a specific religion, or a philosophic system; but rather it provides recommendations that encourage you to stop looking outside for answers and to **start paying attention within**, while at the same time maintaining a sense of faith and trusting that perhaps all the answers are already there.

The intention of the system is to create enough silence in our minds so that we can really hear what our souls are saying. Simultaneously, it encourages us to explore our inner world while remaining present and enjoying life for what it is, rather than what we think it should be. As we move along the path, we start to realize that this newfound sense of presence is key to being able to hear the truth inside. Once again, to put it in simple terms, yoga can be a goal in and of itself, but also a set of practices that allow us to achieve and sustain inner freedom. **Yoga centers the attention in the body, the mind and the spirit**.

This practice situates the body as the temple of the spirit, meaning that we should keep it clean and simple. This translates to keeping our bodies fit, supple, and strong by doing asana practice, exercising, being aware of the breath, eating healthy, finding moderation in everything we do, and learning how to mitigate stress and conflict.

Then the practice invites us to work on our minds, not only by trying to quiet the constant noise in our heads, but also by paying better attention to what we are thinking, why we are thinking what we are thinking, and how our thought patterns affect our lives on the subconscious level.

Behind all these continuously flowing fluctuations of the mind, we find a myriad of mental "narratives" that shape our thoughts, words, actions, and reactions. Without noticing, we strongly believe these narratives come from our own creation and so we hold them as absolute truths. But chances are we acquired these narratives from previous generations; the place, space, and time we were born and raised; and the people we interact with and relate to.

Some of these narratives contribute to our well-being and to the good of others, but some can be especially unproductive. Sadly, we might tend to embrace and reiterate these nonsensical narratives until they become part of who we are, and we cease to question them or where they came from. **These mental patterns guide our decisions, our responses to the external world, even the way we act and behave**.

Again, the point of the practice is to create enough awareness and discernment within ourselves to recognize these unproductive forms of thinking and to discover the calmness of mind that can come by releasing them. This is what we call in yoga "cleaning the mirror of illusion" to discover our own truth. Or simply put, to **find peace of mind**.

As we purify the body and calm the mind, we move toward the more contemplative layers of

our being. We use mindfulness, contemplation, and meditation to stay connected and in tune with our hearts so that we may flow through our lives with a sense of freedom and purpose. In a way, you could say **the more we connect with this inner freedom, the simpler and easier life becomes**. It's not that challenge, conflict, and tragedy cease to exist, but that we simply pass more easily through each moment of turbulence.

Of course, this is easier said than done. We all have experienced those sublime moments when we truly connect with the heart more than the mind, and for a period of time (it could be a second or it could be a month) we experience this sense of peace, freedom, contentment and connection to our inner purpose. **The real challenge in the yoga path is to sustain that peace and wisdom in our daily living, in the moment-to-moment, and under every circumstance regardless of how difficult it is**. That's the real yoga and it takes practice — a lot of it!

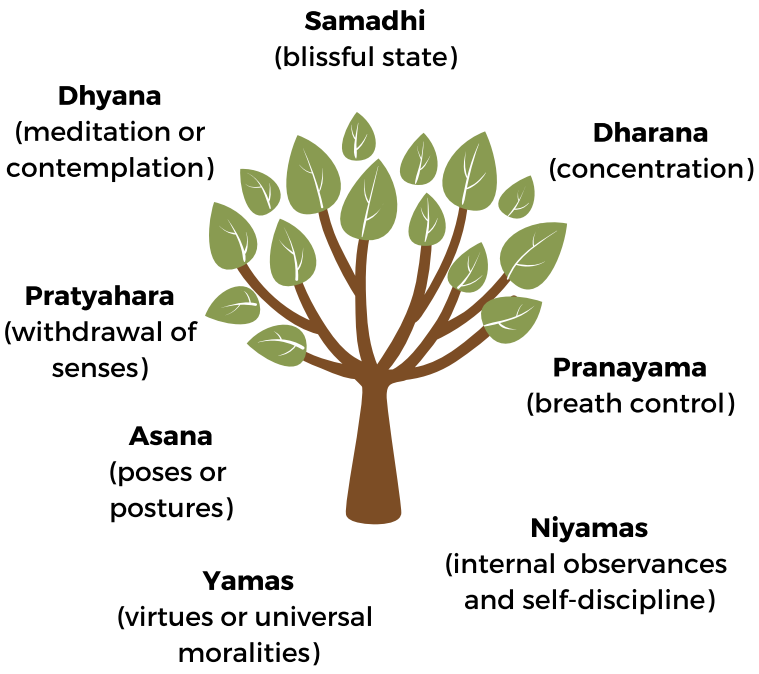
So, having said all this, we have identified an unresolved gap between will and action. We want to do good, but how do we hold onto this peace inside in order to ensure that it happens? That is what the eight-limbed system is all about. It's about staying focused and working on our spiritual path until it comes to fruition in our daily lives.

It doesn't mean we have to become "perfect" (if there is such a thing); **it simply means we try our best over and over again**. And even if we fail at times, we no longer need to fill ourselves with frustration and guilt, because deep down we know we are trying our best and that is enough.

In summary, we can understand **the yoga path and the eightfold system as a way to clean the body, clear the mind, and connect with our souls**. We can think of it as a progressive journey where we commit to exploring who we are, from the most external tangible aspects of our being to the most internal subtleties of our energy and spirit. It's a way to break the veil of illusion that distracts us from the most beautiful obvious reality that it exists: that **love is everything and everything is love** — a personal journey from the mind to the heart.

We will cover each limb in detail throughout this booklet, but to start, here is a diagram of the system so we can start to identify and understand the different terms:

The Eight Limbs of Ashtanga



Course Outline

Part I

THE YAMAS

Ahimsa (non-harming)
Satya (truthfulness)
Asteya (non-stealing)
Brahmacharya (moderation)
Aparigraha (non-attachment)

Part II

THE NIYAMAS

Saucha (cleansing)
Tapas (discipline)
Santosha (contentment)
Svadhyaya (self-study)
Ishvara Pranidhana (surrender)

Part III

ASANA (physical practice)

Part IV

PRANAYAMA (breath control)

Part V

THE FINAL FOUR LIMBS

Pratyahara (withdrawl of the senses)
Dharana (focus)
Dhyana (meditation)
Samadhi (enlightenment)

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Part I

The Yamas

Moralities of the Universe

SIMPLICITY, PATIENCE, COMPASSION.
These are your three greatest treasures.
Simple, in actions and thoughts. You return to the source of being.
Patient, with both friends and enemies. You accord with the way things are.
Compassionate, towards yourself. You reconcile all beings in the world.

THE YAMAS: AN INTRODUCTION

MORALITIES OF THE UNIVERSE

What if we didn't harm other beings, including animals, or ourselves?
What if we were truthful to each other and to our own hearts?
What if we did not take things that weren't meant for us?
What if we could control our senses and preserve our energy?
And on top of that, what if we could get rid of things that didn't serve us anymore?

The first limb of the eightfold path starts with the "yamas" (external restraints), a set of five guidelines suggesting how we should interact with the world around us. To do this, we first need to observe our interactions with others; and by others, I mean **all living organisms**, including the environment itself.

The "yamas" are tools we can use to master our actions and behaviors in the world. When I am teaching yoga, I often share a saying that I have heard many times during my life, and that is: "**the real yoga begins off the mat**." It begins here, by putting in the work and prudently managing our relationships with the outside world. Now, that does not necessarily mean we have to focus on the "yamas" before we begin practicing yoga as we understand it today (which is the postural yoga, or the "asana" practice).

In fact, the first four limbs of the ashtanga path should all walk together holding hands. **The combination of asana practice, breathing techniques, and meditation greatly contribute to breaking away from internal turmoil by connecting us to a sense of calmness.** These principles make us more compassionate and grounded, allowing us to remain calm and find equanimity in moments of adversity. We are then able to be more thoughtful in our actions and make wiser decisions.

The five "yama" principles are: non-harming ("ahiṃsā"), truthfulness ("satya"), non-stealing ("asteya"), moderation ("brahmacharya"), and non-attachment ("aparigraha"). **In the end, the intention of the "yamas" is to make us more aware and responsible for our own behaviors.** These concepts can be used like a compass to help you navigate through life and find your spiritual path.

THE YAMAS

AHIMSA

NON-HARMING

"IN THINKING, KEEP TO THE SIMPLE.
IN CONFLICT, BE FAIR AND GENEROUS.
IN GOVERNING, DON'T TRY TO CONTROL.
IN WORK, DO WHAT YOU ENJOY.
IN FAMILY LIFE, BE COMPLETELY PRESENT."
- LAO TZU

"Ahimsa" (non-harming) is the first principle of the yamas for good reason: **it sums up all the other restraints and encompasses the intention of all the following principles.** If we were to vehemently practice this virtue and dedicate our lives to it, everything else we are looking to achieve would follow.

There is a story that I love from one of my favorite books, Tuesdays with Morrie by Mitch Albom. The story is about a little wave, bobbing along in the ocean, having a grand old time. He's enjoying the wind and the fresh air — until he notices the other waves in front of him, crashing against the shore. The wave freaks out and says "Look what's going to happen to me!" Then along comes another wave. It sees the first wave looking grim, and says to him, "Why do you look so sad?" The first wave says, "You don't understand! We're all going to crash! All of us waves are going to be nothing! Isn't it terrible?" The second wave responds, "No, you don't understand. You are not just a wave, you are part of the ocean."

Every book that I have read about the concept of ahimsa begins by explaining what the principle is and how to put it into practice. But the story above reminds me that perhaps **the easiest way to be kind to other living beings is to first create a sense of belonging.**

When Patanjali explains the roots of suffering, one of the primary things he mentions is the Ego. To be clear, the Ego is not necessarily bad, as it allows us to form our sense of individuality and find our purpose. But when we get too caught up in our unique individualities, or we

start buying into the idea that "it is all about me," then we lose our sense of connection to something greater than ourselves. **We forget that we are part of Mother Nature and we share this magical energy with other living beings.**

When we lose this sense of connection, then it becomes more difficult to prevent harming others. **In reality, nothing really belongs to us — we all belong to something greater.** Once we create this mental shift by recognizing that life is not about "me" (it is about "us"), then harming others would cause as much pain as harming ourselves.

The observance of ahimsa has multiple applications, **starting with the development of an attitude of kindness and compassion toward ourselves and others**. When we truly practice the philosophy of yoga, we approach nature with a compassionate attitude. We acknowledge our responsibility to observe and minimize our consumption habits. We take only what we need in order to maintain nature's beauty and balance. We research where our items are coming from and reflect on the full cost of acquiring them. Lastly, we may even become more mindful of our diets and how they impact other living beings.

Furthermore, we should consider being more kind with our words, as verbal violence can sometimes be as harmful as physical aggression. Gossiping, judging, criticizing, and even communicating passive aggressively can be considered harmful to others. And finally, changing the way we treat and talk to ourselves is a great way to start practicing ahimsa. Self-judgement and self-criticism are as damaging as many other forms of violence, so we must commit to practicing kindness, compassion, and generosity toward ourselves as well as other beings.

Tips for practicing Ahimsa

1. Toward Mother Nature:
    a. Review your consumption patterns.
    b. Be more mindful of your diet by examining where your food is coming from and how it is being produced.
    c. For the long term, start questioning where your purchases are coming from. Commit to researching products before purchasing them, and then support companies with non-harmful values.
2. Toward yourself:
    a. Take a look inside at your internal dialogue. Are you treating yourself with kindness and compassion?
    b. When you examine yourself in the mirror, try to acknowledge what makes you beautiful and unique, rather than focusing on your flaws.
    c. Develop personal mantras that increase self-love. Say something like: "you are enough" or "remember that you are loved" — anything that resonates with you during this moment in time.
3. Toward others:
    a. This week, I urge you to be more aware of your judgements and criticisms of others. Every time you think a negative thought about another, try to replace it with a

positive one.

b. Practice RAK (Random Acts of Kindness) everyday. Try to be mindful of the needs of other people instead of only thinking of your own.

c. Review how you treat others, especially the ones you are closest to. Recognize if you try to control or change them in any way. Let's practice love and acceptance for these people, and do the same for people you've had (or have) conflict with. Make an effort to understand their point of view, and remember that each person is fighting their own internal battle.

If any of these ideas resonate with you, I recommend writing out notes, observations, and further ideas.

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Bodhi Surf + Yoga, Bahia Ballena, Osa, Costa Rica
Photo by Anki Cramer

THE YAMAS

SATYA

TRUTHFULNESS

SATYAM BRUVAT PRIYAM BRUVAT.
"SPEAK WHAT IS TRUE, SPEAK WHAT IS PLEASANT."
- SRI SWAMI SATCHIDANANDA

The second yama is "satya", or truthfulness. This principle becomes especially powerful when combined with ahimsa, as the marriage of the two will reflect positively in our actions. In the context of the yamas, truthfulness not only emphasizes "not lying," but more importantly, **it means learning to talk and act from a place of respect and integrity; a place where speech and action are in alignment with each other.**

In the language of yoga, there is a widely used Sanskrit word "Viveka," which means discernment. **The practice of satya begins with discernment, developing awareness of where our thoughts and judgments are coming from.** Satya not only means telling the truth, but more so, being aware of when it is a good time to speak your truth. Satya teaches us how to discern when to speak up, how best to communicate, and even how to differentiate between truth and personal opinion.

I once heard that when we feel the urge to express something we believe to be true, we must first ask **four basic questions**:
- Is what I am about to say really the truth?
- Is it necessary for me to say it?
- Is it kind?
- Is it timely?

When we start to incorporate these four questions, we may come to realize that our opinions often vary from the truth and that we don't need to express everything we think. **Looking for the right moment and the right way to express something is actually a display of love and respect toward others. What is more, the intention behind our words is just as important as telling the truth.** Perhaps something might be true, but are we saying it to hurt or help someone?

So as part of acting with integrity,

every time we are about to say something that might cause harm, we should try to explore where that urge is really coming from — this is perhaps one of the purest manifestations of honesty.

In conversation, practicing both ahimsa and satya means to avoid gossip, destructive criticism, and passive aggressive communication. To practice both principles in unison is to continuously observe what we intend to say, making sure that each statement is coming from a genuine, non-harmful place.

But satya is not only about what we say; **we must also ensure that our actions reflect our words.** Satya is about showing up, staying committed, and admitting when we are wrong (even if it hurts). It's about doing the right thing over and over again, even if we don't want to or if it doesn't seem to benefit us. Again, this principle is about integrity, reliability, and becoming a trustworthy person.

Tips for practicing Satya

1. Toward yourself:
   a. Reflect on your values and see if your actions really reflect your moral beliefs. How or what can you modify to be more truthful to them?
   b. Avoid using excuses to justify what you did or didn't do.
   c. Practice showing up and acknowledging your shortcomings.
2. Toward others:
   a. Before saying something that might hurt someone, make sure to examine your intentions by ensuring the statement passes the four question test.
   b. Avoid talking badly about anyone.

If any of these concepts resonate with you, I recommend writing out notes, observations, and further ideas.

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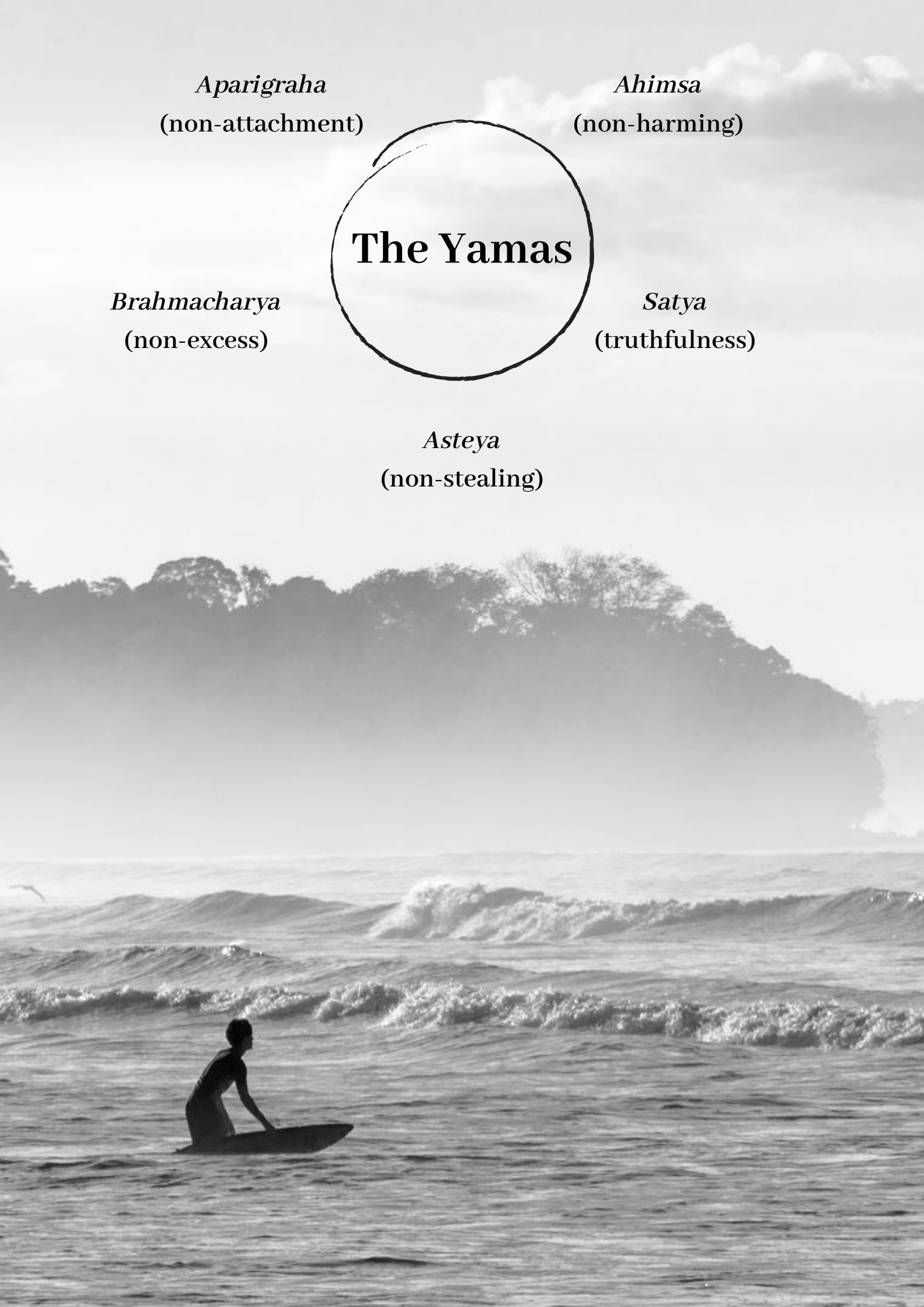
Aparigraha
(non-attachment)
Ahimsa
(non-harming)
The Yamas
Brahmacharya
(non-excess)
Satya
(truthfulness)
Asteya
(non-stealing)

THE YAMAS

ASTEYA

NON-STEALING

"YOUR ACTIONS ARE YOUR ONLY TRUE BELONGINGS."
- BUDDHA

"Asteya" means non-stealing, or simply not taking what does not belong to you. In this context, non-stealing also means not taking ideas from others or stealing their time and energy. In yoga, the desire to steal comes from a place of ignorance, envy, greed, and/or attachment. On the other hand, the full manifestation of non-stealing is an expression of respect, integrity, and caring for others.

According to yoga philosophy, there are **subtle ways of stealing** that should also be avoided. For example, practicing asteya means not stealing time at work by slacking off, not stealing time and energy from people by manipulating them, and making sure to compensate others fairly. Another form of stealing is interrupting a conversation and making the it about yourself. Egoism is another form of stealing, especially when it manifests in hoarding behavior.

We must not only avoid stealing from others, but from the Earth as well. **We are temporary inhabitants of this nurturing planet, and although nature may provide us with more than we need to survive and thrive, we must not throw off nature's balance by taking more than is necessary.** Again, we can see here how the principles of asteya and ahimsa dance to the same tune.

When we over-consume nature's resources in an unconscious manner, we are not only stealing in the present, but also from future generations. Therefore, the concept of **sustainable development** can be understood as a means of practicing asteya.

Sustainable development is defined as development that meets the needs of today without compromising the ability of future generations to fulfill their own needs. So when

when we combine the principles of non-harming, truthfulness, and non-stealing (plus the two upcoming principles), we use yogic values to become nature's ambassadors.

Tips for practicing Asteya

1. Toward yourself:
   a. Don't steal time off your life — make every moment count! Of course each moment looks different depending on your energy levels, but strive to move through each activity in the day with presence and mindfulness.
2. Toward others:
   a. Take a look at all the possessions you have and see if there's something of value that you can give to someone in need.
   b. Practice actively listening to those around you.
3. Toward Mother Nature:
   a. Every time you are about to buy something, think about whether or not you really need it or are going to use it. Try repeating the following mantra: "Take only what you need."

If any of these concepts resonate with you, I recommend writing out notes, observations, and further ideas.

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Osa Peninsula, Costa Rica
Photo by Bernard Poscher

THE YAMAS

BRAHMACHARYA

NON-EXCESS

"MODERATION IN ALL THINGS, ESPECIALLY MODERATION."
- RALPH WALDO EMERSON

The fourth virtue of the yamas is "brahmacharya," or non-excess, which invites us to **consistently honor the sacredness of life by moderating our consumption habits**. The intention behind brahmacharya is for us to start learning how to control the flow of energy that occurs within our bodies, and to maintain our vital energy (prana) instead of wasting it.

"Brahmacharya reminds us to enter each day and each action with a sense of holiness rather than indulgence, so that our days may be lived in the wonder of sacredness rather than the misery of excess." - Deborah Adele, Yamas & Niyamas: Exploring Yoga's Ethical Practice

I once read that Tirumalai Krishnamacharya (the father of modern yoga) said **anything in excess becomes a poison in our bodies, even things we normally consider to be good and healthy for us.** So, moderation applies to everything we do, whether we are eating, sleeping, working, resting, or exercising.

Brahmacharya is about avoiding overindulgence, which can be achieved by tuning into our bodies rather than listening to the false narratives that force us to seek pleasure instead. It is for this reason that practicing brahmacharya allows us to overcome bad habits and avoid developing new ones.

One of the intentions of brahmacharya is for us to learn how to enjoy the pleasures of life without becoming attached or obsessed with them. Over-indulgence occurs when we develop addictive behavior toward some "thing" — food, alcohol, sex, television, social media, work, exercise, people, and so on. The point is to learn to enjoy things without allowing those things to become overindulgent crutches or negative habits.

Tips for practicing Brahmacharya

One of the best ways to practice moderation is by applying mindfulness in your daily life.

- Be conscious of your food consumption. Whenever you sit down to eat, be sure to honor that moment. Eat mindfully and stop when you're half full.
- Review your relationship with technology and social media. How much time are you spending on your phone or other electronic devices that distract you from being present among loved ones? If you find that you are spending too much time with technology, perhaps it's a good idea to break up that time with an activity that reminds you of the holiness of life. Try taking a nature hike, lighting some candles, breathing deeply while stretching, or listening to calming music.
- Analyze your exercise routine. Are you working out too much or too little? What is your intention behind exercising? Is it to honor your body and elevate your energy levels? Or does it come from a desire to change your body based on societal expectations?
- We live in a society where overworking is seen as a positive quality and demanded by others in many cases. Take a long look at your own productivity and see how much you can work without creating damage or sacrificing other areas of your life.
- Review your sleep habits. Maybe try going to bed earlier so that you can rise with the first light of day.
- Make sure to reflect on your alcohol consumption, along with other potentially excessive habits like drinking caffeine. As my dear friend and teacher Tim Miller used to say: "The first margarita is always a good idea, the second maybe not so much, and the third — definitely a bad idea!"

If any of these concepts resonate with you, I recommend writing out notes, observations, and further ideas.

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THE YAMAS

APARIGRAHA

NON-POSSESSIVENESS

"TO UNDERSTAND THE LIMITATION OF THINGS, DESIRE THEM."
- LAO TZU

"Aparigraha" means non-possessiveness, non-attachment, non-grasping, non-clinging, non-greed, and non-coveting. Basically, **this principle is about enjoying all the good things that come into our lives while maintaining the capacity to let them go when it is time to do so.**

For those of us immersed in the lay world, practicing this principle is not as easy as it may seem. **Aparigraha is about more than just letting go of "things," but also letting go of ideas, concepts, and expectations that may be holding us back and preventing us from being free.** It means accepting that good things in our lives might someday go away. We can learn to be okay with this notion by keeping in mind that more good things shall come in the future.

I remember reading a story about a man who went looking for advice from a wise old Rabbi in his hometown. One day, this man knocked on the door of the Rabbi, and when the door opened, the man noticed that the house was empty inside. And so the man asked the Rabbi, "Where are all your things?" The Rabbi replied with the same question, "Where are yours?" The man then said, "I am just a visitor here." And the Rabbi responded, "As am I."

This story displays the capacity of the Rabbi to let go of things he does not absolutely need, as well as his understanding that **"things" only have value when we ascribe value to them**. Oftentimes, what we think we need is actually something that we want. So again, this virtue of non-attachment can benefit from Viveka (discernment), by allowing us to distinguish between wants and needs. The principle of aparigraha inspires us to become "light travelers," which ultimately allows us to enjoy the ride a bit more.

Furthermore, it encourages us to appreciate the things we have with a heightened sense of gratitude. This thankfulness for what has been given affords us a non-covetous sense of freedom. As I once read, **"Gratitude turns what we already have into enough."**

Whatever we possess right now (tangible or intangible), whatever we think belongs to us, might at some point go away. All we can do is try to enjoy what we have in the moment, while remembering that change is a constant in our lives. When we rely on people or material things to make us happy, or if we allow our happiness to be attached to youth, beauty, success, money, possessions, or status, then it will be very difficult to maintain our sense of happiness when those things are gone.

Tips for practicing Aparigraha

- Declutter your house, closets, and workspace.
- In order to achieve more personal freedom, make an inventory of all things that you feel attached to but would be willing to let go of.

If any of these concepts resonate with you, I recommend writing out notes, observations, and further ideas.

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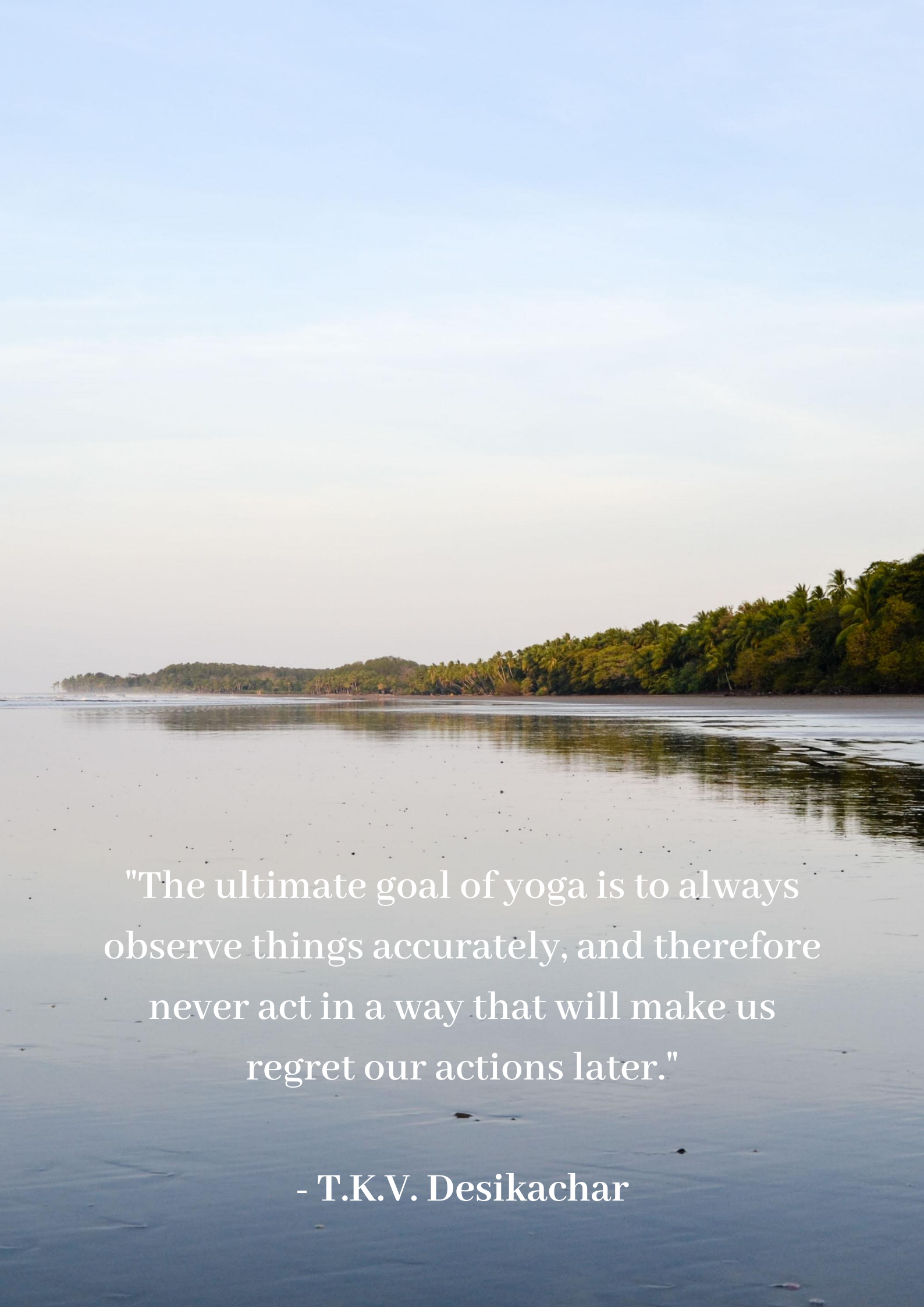
Bodhi Surf + Yoga, Bahia Ballena, Osa, Costa Rica
Photo by Anki Cramer


"The ultimate goal of yoga is to always observe things accurately, and therefore never act in a way that will make us regret our actions later."
- T.K.V. Desikachar

Bodhi
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Part II

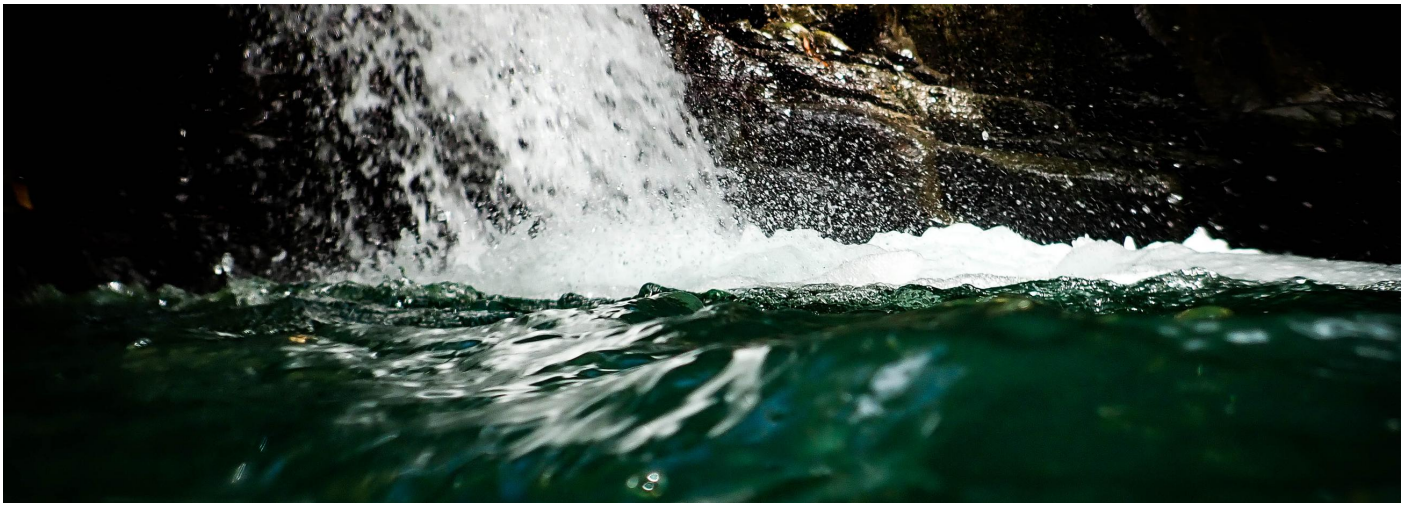
The Niyamas

Internal Observances

"Rid your body of its impurities, let your speech be true and sweet, feel friendship for the world, and with humility seek wealth and knowledge."
- Tirumalai Krishnamacharya

THE NIYAMAS: AN INTRODUCTION

INTERNAL OBSERVANCES



The second limb of the Ashtanga Yoga path is composed of five "niyamas", or internal observances, that offer a roadmap for improving how we treat ourselves. Niyama cultivates new actions and habits that help us dig deeper into our spiritual lives.

Paramahansa Yogananda — one of the first yogi's to bring yoga philosophy and practice to the West in the 1920s — referred to yoga as a path to self-realization. Thus, the second branch of the eightfold path provides us with more than just guidelines; **the niyamas are constructive tools.**

When we think about the niyamas, we should not think of them as goals to be achieved but rather precepts to follow continuously throughout our lives. As previously mentioned, the system works from the visible to the invisible. **Having established a moral foundation that dictates your external behavior, you can then turn inward and center your focus on an area that nobody can see but you — your inner world.**

The five niyama practices are cleanliness (saucha), contentment (santosha), self-discipline (tapas), self-study (svadhyaya), and devotion (Ishvara pranidhana).

THE NIYAMAS

SAUCHA

CLEANLINESS

"THE BODY IS YOUR TEMPLE. KEEP IT PURE AND CLEAN FOR THE SOUL TO RESIDE IN."

The first observance of the niyamas is about establishing practices that will conserve our purity, not only physically but mentally as well.

In practice, "saucha" means eating healthy, exercising regularly, making time for rest and adequate sleep, and working in moderation to reduce stress. This observance also means maintaining good hygiene and creating habits that will keep our bodies healthy and strong (this is where asana practice is vital). Finally, it helps to keep your surrounding environment clean by decluttering your room, home, car, workplace, and so on.

Furthermore, saucha invites us to seek purity in our minds. Just like decluttering your home, you can also declutter your mind by getting rid of negative thought patterns and cultivating viveka, or discernment. The idea is for us to slow down so that we can pay more attention from moment to moment. We must also observe what we are thinking, and start to question the origin and validity of our thoughts before accepting them as absolute truths. Meditation is of course an essential practice for "cleaning" our minds. Although learning how to meditate may seem intimidating at the start, it is an integral part of the mind purification process.

I once learned a valuable practice from a friend who has been practicing meditation for many years. He told me that **it is important to pay attention to your thoughts and learn to discern which thoughts are "skillful" and which are "unskillful".** Skillful thoughts are those that truly contribute to your personal well-being and/or the well-being of others, while unskillful thoughts are anything outside of that.

Finally, the practice of saucha encourages us to seek purity by allowing each moment to be as it is. **In order to achieve this, we must prioritize slowing down and being present.** This idea is somewhat contradictory to the norms of modern Western society, which seems to value

rushing, multitasking, and being overwhelmingly busy all the time.

The observance of saucha instead asks us to put care and attention into each moment by simply focusing on one thing at a time. **Whether eating, working, resting, actively listening to others, or spending time with loved ones, shaucha invites us to embody a deep sense of attentiveness.** If we are successful in this practice, we may return to a more natural state of being. Like Lao Tzu once said, "Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished."

Tips for practicing Saucha

- Pay attention to the amount of time you spend moving each day. You do not have to be working out strenuously all the time, but make sure to stay in motion throughout the day.
- Make a conscious effort to "be here now" in the moment-to-moment. Try putting your phone away before sitting down to eat, and then take a moment to give thanks for the food you are about to consume.
- Pay attention to your thoughts and try to classify them as skillful or unskillful. Practice viveka, or discernment, to rid your mind of negativity.

If any of these concepts resonate with you, I recommend writing out notes, observations, and further ideas.

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Bodhi Surf + Yoga, Bahia Ballena, Osa, Costa Rica
Photo by Hannah Walsh

THE NIYAMAS

TAPAS

SELF-DISCIPLINE

"DISCIPLINE IS HAVING ENOUGH RESPECT FOR YOURSELF TO MAKE CHOICES THAT TRULY NOURISH YOUR WELL-BEING AND PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR EXPANSIVE GROWTH."
- DONNA FARHI

"Tapas" is Sanskrit for "heat", which at first glance doesn't seem to be in accord with the practice of "self-discipline". However, in the context of the eightfold path, **the external observance of tapas can be understood as any practice that burns out impurities in order to transform both body and mind.**

From a historical point of view, tapas would have been practiced by sages and Sadhus (religious ascetics) through long periods of fasting or meditation to cleanse the body and mind. Whether these self-disciplinary practices are physical or mental, we can understand them as methods for making the body stronger and healthier. Additionally, tapas includes "austerities", or abstaining from certain things in order to develop better impulse control.

I once heard from a yoga teacher that **we can best approach our yoga practice by applying the three "D's" of Devotion, Determination, and Discipline.** This attitude is as applicable to the asana practice as it is to anything else you may try to achieve in life. And from the yoga perspective, it is not about the achievement in itself (which can be very ephemeral), but about the lessons that can be learned along the way. The path toward achievement is what fosters one's devotion, determination, and discipline.

There are many simple examples for how we can cultivate self-discipline in our lives without having to practice ascetic rituals like the Sadhus. Yes, fasting is a traditional form of practicing tapas, but it is important to approach this method (and all other methods) with ahimsa, or non-violence. **With the right intention, we can work on controlling the many impulses of the mind by focusing on what the body needs rather than what it craves.**

Modern-day examples of self-discipline include training for a marathon, learning a new musical instrument, taking up painting, or even developing new habits like meditating or waking up at sunrise.

Another meaningful way of practicing tapas is by letting go of things that you feel attached to, especially if those things are preventing you from experiencing freedom. For example, you could abstain from drinking alcohol or coffee for a period of time, take a break from social media, or even avoid talking excessively during conversations. **It is important to note that practicing austerities as a form of tapas means searching for unnecessary attachments that may be causing more harm than good.** Sure, experiencing pleasure is an important part of life, but that does not mean that we should always favor pleasure-seeking activities. The concept of tapas highlights the importance of identifying both attachments and weaknesses so that we can move beyond them in a healthy manner.

When it comes to the physical practice of yoga, incorporating tapas means developing the discipline to wake up everyday and perform your asana practice. The combination of ancient movement and breathing techniques is best practiced at the same time everyday, thus allowing the body to develop a healthy cycle. I will go deeper into the asana and pranayama practices later on, but note that consistency is a key part of developing a successful routine.

Tips for practicing Tapas

- Make a list of goals, projects, or hobbies that you would like to take on. See if you can commit to at least one of these goals.
- Make a list of productive habits that you would like to adopt, and pick one that you can incorporate into your life today.
- Make a list of unproductive habits and see which ones you can start addressing today. Take your time; go one by one.
- Take a look at your daily life and see if you can find any addictive patterns or behaviors that you would like to release.

If any of these concepts resonate with you, I recommend writing out notes, observations, and further ideas.

NOTES

The Niyamas

Saucha (cleanliness)

Tapas (discipline)

Santosha (contentment)

Svadhyaya (self-study)

Isvara Pranidhana (devotion)

THE NIYAMAS

SANTOSHA

CONTENTMENT

"HAPPINESS IS NOT JUST SOMETHING YOU FEEL — IT IS WHO YOU ARE."
- DAN MILLMAN, WAY OF THE PEACEFUL WARRIOR

There once was a fish who spent most of her life desperately searching for an incomprehensibly vast and beautiful thing called "The Ocean." The fish got so caught up in her search for The Ocean, that she failed to recognize she was already submerged in it.

I think of this funny little conundrum whenever I reflect on the concept of "santosha" — the second observance of the niyamas. Santosha translates to "contentment" or "happiness". In the context of yoga, happiness has a very different meaning than the one defined by modern society.

In my original understanding of this concept, the pursuit of happiness was a constant chase for something just out of grasp. I would eventually achieve happiness, but only if I tried really hard. Society tells us that in order to be happy we must attain certain things: dream job, financial stability, house, car, spouse, family, and so on.

However, just like the fish in our tale, many of us are searching for a **metaphorical ocean of bliss** without noticing that we are already immersed in it. Nothing needs to be chased and nothing needs to be achieved. **We simply must awaken to the beauty of each moment, while acknowledging the magical realm in which we swim.**

I prefer the yoga perspective of happiness because it gives us more responsibility and control of our individual well-being and inner peace. Instead of getting down on ourselves for not having achieved happiness (based on success), this new understanding of true contentment places us in the driver's seat of our own lives.

Oscar Wilde once said that there are two tragedies in life: one is not getting what you want, and the other is getting it. Perhaps Wilde knew that satisfying likes and avoiding dislikes only serves to put us on a path of constant pursuit and avoidance. True freedom and contentment can only be achieved when we begin to see things as they are, rather than manipulating them to suit our personal preferences. (Deborah Adele, Yamas & Niyamas: Exploring Yoga's Ethical Practice).

Another important aspect of santosha is that we must recognize the difference between inner contentment and fleeting emotions like momentary joy and cheerfulness. As the saying goes, **"emotions are the passing weather of our lives,"** meaning that emotions fluctuate in the same way that thoughts do. To be in a state of contentment is to feel a deep sense of calm, gratitude, and freedom.

The practice of santosha can lead to the realization that life is already grand as it is. We do not need to fill up the empty spaces or fix what we perceive to be broken based on societal constructs; **we may achieve contentment by recognizing the beauty that already exists.**

So how do we do this? According to the Yoga Sutras, we can start by freeing ourselves from desires, needs, and attachments.

Tips for practicing Santosha

- Make a list of all the things, people, and situations that you are grateful for. Make an effort to spend as much time as you can with the people you care about, and try to find time and space regularly to do the things you love.
- Every time you feel an overwhelming emotion that clouds your inner peace, visualize yourself detaching from that emotion. Breathe deeply into the experience and begin to imagine letting go of the emotion (little by little).
- Avoid acting or reacting impulsively when you encounter "bad weather".

If any of these concepts resonate with you, I recommend writing out notes, observations, and further ideas.

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THE NIYAMAS

SVADHYAYA

STUDY OF SELF

"YOU SEE PEOPLE AND THINGS NOT AS THEY ARE, BUT AS YOU ARE."
- ANTHONY DE MELLO

"Svadhyaya" is Sanskrit for "self-study", and it provides us with the perfect opportunity to pause and take a look at who we are. The self-study process is like peeling back the layers of an onion until we get to the core. We can start delayering by asking important questions about the nature of our being: What and who do you identify with? What do you believe to be true? What are your likes and dislikes? What are your biggest fears? **This process of self-observation begins by questioning pre-existing mental narratives.**

The other day I was listening to a talk by Tara Brach, a well-known psychologist and meditation teacher. She was talking about how anything that makes us feel negative emotions like anger, sadness, or resentment stems from a deep fear that we hold inside. Therefore, it is important to start by identifying our fears and examining what negative emotions those fears produce on a daily basis.

For example, perhaps you've had a conflict with a friend because they criticized you. It is easy to blame the other person for hurting your feelings, but if you want to practice svadhyaya, then you must first question the origin of that negative emotion. Why do you feel angry or sad with your friend? Is it because you are disappointed that you didn't meet the expectations of others? And if so, why do you feel the need to meet people's expectations?

Studying your relationships with others is actually an important method of studying yourself. Observing your thoughts and feelings toward others can in fact provide you with valuable insight on what's going on inside. And what is more, working to improve relationships with the people around you is an important aspect of living a spiritual life.

According to yoga philosophy, holding anger, resentment, or judgement can create a sense of

separation that may enhance the Ego in a harmful manner. On the contrary, feelings of kindness and compassion produce a sense of oneness with the external environment, especially in regard to other living beings. Again, examining your feelings, thoughts, and actions toward others may provide you with relevant feedback about your own inner world.

Another important aspect of svadhyaya is the discovery of external conditioning. From an early age, we are all conditioned to think and act a certain way, which results in a particular set of values and beliefs. This is a natural part of living within a society; we all have to sign and abide by the social contract for the system to work. We then develop a "model of reality" which shows up in our morals, ethics, and actions. This same model of reality tends to inform our expectations and disappointments.

The observance of svadhyaya invites us to re-evaluate this conditioned model of reality in order to identify which aspects serve us and which do not. **By prioritizing self-development and improvement, we begin to nourish thoughts and feelings that result in truth and compassion, while starving negative emotions that bring harm to ourselves and others.**

One day, an elder Cherokee man was teaching his grandson about life: "A battle is raging inside me," he said to the boy. "It is a tooth-and-nail fight between two wolves — one evil, one good. The evil wolf represents anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, deception, false pride, superiority, and ego. The good wolf represents joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith." The wiseman paused for a moment and then said to the boy, "This very same battle is raging inside of you — and everyone else for that matter." The boy took a moment to respond, "Which wolf will win?" The old Cherokee simply replied, "Whichever one you feed."

Tips for practicing Svadhyaya

- Take a moment to reflect on your current relationships with others. Then, make a mental note of the positive and negative feelings you've had toward those you love and those you've had conflict with. If you still have unresolved issues with anyone, then try to examine the root cause of that tension.
- Re-evaluate your conditioned "model of reality" and see what areas you may need to work on to improve your ability to express truth and compassion.

If any of these concepts resonate with you, I recommend writing out notes, observations, and further ideas.

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THE NIYAMAS

ISHVARA PRANIDHANA

DEVOTION, SURRENDER

"THE OPEN HEART SEES, FEELS, AND ABSORBS THE BEAUTY OF THE WORLD."
- SONIA CHOQUETTE

Whenever I discuss the eightfold path with my students, I am always a bit apprehensive to speak about this particular observance because from an orthodox point of view, "Ishvara pranidhana" means “devotion to God”. However, this observance can be interpreted in a way that transcends religiosity, and the more I study this niyama, the better I understand its true application.

Ishvara pranidhana is simply about cultivating a deeper sense of faith and devotion to forces both pure and divine — forces that represent the magic, mystery, and beauty of life on this planet. I have added the term “surrender” as an alternative translation of this precept in order to invite all participants to stand in awe of the divine mystery of life.

One of my favorite activities is running (especially in nature), and I am one of the lucky people who often experiences “runner’s high” — that serendipitous moment when I lose myself in the experience. Whether you are a runner or not, I am sure you can relate to this **blissful, ego-dissolving state of mind.** For me, this experience has shown up while running, hiking, or watching my daughters play and laugh. For others, bliss may be experienced while playing in the ocean, watching a beautiful sunset, or any other moment of deep connection with nature.

These experiences show us **the true essence of being human** — akin to holding a newborn baby for the first time. Any deep manifestation of love or bliss (during which we may even experience a sense of timelessness) is what I like to call a “state of surrender”, and once you experience this state, you begin to feel something magical stirring inside of you. **It is in these fleeting moments of surrender that we are capable of waking up to the magic that surrounds us, as we are simple strands in the web of life.**

Ishvara pranidhana cultivates awareness of the grand vastness of life, ultimately allowing us to become active participants in this experience by letting go of the things we cannot control. To fully surrender is to immerse yourself in the ebb and flow of life, trusting that life unfolds as it should.

Whenever I think of this observance, a lovely Bob Marley verse pops into my head: "There's a natural mystic blowing through the air. If you listen carefully now you will hear."

To close this chapter, I would like to share a "yoga" story of my own. When I was twenty-two years old, I discovered yoga, and my life has never been the same since. I was hooked. After my initial discovery, I began practicing more and more over the next few years until I decided to pursue this passion on a deeper level.

At the time, yoga was still quite a new practice in Costa Rica, so at the age of twenty-five, I traveled to the United States to study Ashtanga Vinyasa. But I also dreamed of traveling to Greece and living there for a time, and so that's what I did.

Although I had discovered yoga and fell in love with the practice, I was still trying to find my place in the world. What was my purpose? What did I want to do with the rest of my life? I felt incomplete, and at the same time had to find a balance between pursuing passions and paying the bills. How would I become a successful professional, achieve financial independence, and make everyone happy?

After very little research (because the internet barely worked during those days), I found an "off the beaten path" yoga retreat called **Yoga Plus** that was run by two amazing (and very humble) Ashtanga Yoga teachers. I sent them an email asking for work, and about a month later received a short response from one of the teachers, Radha Warell, giving me the green light to come and work there. So I packed my bags and left.

Yoga Plus is located in what was then a very isolated little town called Agios Pavlos on the southern coast of Crete. I spent a summer there cleaning rooms, cooking, and helping out around the lodge. Work was physically demanding, as was the yoga with these teachers, but the experience was surreal! I had one day off per week which I would spend hiking all day by myself on these radical sandy mountains and rocky cliffs that faced the Mediterranean Sea. I felt deeply alive. The combination of these experiences finally made me feel whole, connected, and AWAKE.

I came back from hiking one day and ran into my yoga teacher Radha. I made sure to express just how deeply present and alive I felt in that moment. I had decided to stay in Greece for good. As an avid practitioner who truly embodies the yoga practice, Radha listened attentively to my sentiment. And then, in her soft-spoken tone, she told me that what I needed to understand was that perhaps all these experiences had simply fostered an awakening to the mystery of life, now that I was open to it. Because I knew how to access that

blissful state, Radha told me that I need not ascribe my internal bliss to an external place — that I should carry that experience and knowledge with me wherever I go.

Decades have passed since we had that profound conversation, yet I still carry its insight with me. It has been one of the most revealing outcomes of my "yoga path" — **the realization that we hold inside the key to our own happiness.** For the first time in my adult life I had allowed myself to relinquish control of my pre-existing false narratives of who I was supposed to be and what I was supposed to do to live up to societal expectations. By letting go and surrendering to my bliss, I was able to access my true self. I was present, free, and "in flow".

So whenever I get into the "I am super busy" mode (which happens quite frequently these days), I try to revisit that blissful place and experience that content state inside of me. I still carry the experience with me wherever I am, and this is one of the biggest lessons that yoga has brought into my life. For me, this story is what Ishvara pranidhana is all about.

Tips for practicing Ishvara Pranidhana

- Spend more time in nature — ideally in silence and by yourself.
- Spend quality time with loved ones. Try to become an observer of the experience. Notice each and every detail and embrace the moment.
- Make a list of what brings purpose and meaning to your life.
- Write down your own story of personal experience as it relates to the observances of devotion and surrender.

If any of these concepts resonate with you, I recommend writing out notes, observations, and further ideas.

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Bodhi Surf + Yoga, Bahia Ballena, Osa, Costa Rica
Photo by Anki Cramer

Bodhi
SURF+YOGA

Part III

Asana

Postures

ASANA

YOGA POSTURES

"THE STUDY OF ASANA IS NOT ABOUT MASTERING POSTURE. IT'S ABOUT USING POSTURE TO UNDERSTAND AND TRANSFORM YOURSELF."
- B.K.S. IYENGAR

"Asana", which means sitting down, is the third limb of the eightfold path of Ashtanga, and is commonly associated with modern day yoga. However, it should be noted that **only a small portion of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras is dedicated to outlining the asana practice**, which consists of just 11 seated postures meant to support meditation and breathing. Considering this fact, how is it that asana has gained such relevance in today's society?

Let's take a look at the development of the asana practice from the 11 seated postures of antiquity to the full practice of today. After the original seated postures were outlined in the Yoga Sutras, another important Sanskrit manual came along in the 15th century that added many standing postures to the asana practice. Hatha Yoga Pradipika was the first text to detail the **Hatha branch of yoga**, which is more closely aligned to the modern context of yoga as it includes a wide variety of postures, both seated and standing.

Then came Tirumalai Krishnamacharya, an Indian yoga teacher and scholar, who developed **Vinyasa Yoga** in the early 20th century. Vinyasa is a branch of yoga that links postures together in a particular order (known as Krama), and combines this sequence with a slow and balanced breath. Krishnamacharya taught people of all ages, and his method was very individualized. One of his famous phrases that underscored this principle was, **"Teach what is appropriate for every person."**

Krishnamacharya also studied **Ayurveda** — yoga's sister-science that utilizes a holistic approach for treating illness and disease. Under this system, healing was practiced through a

combination of asana, breathwork, and a specific individualized diet.

Many of Krishnamacharya's students went on to further develop the yoga practice and disseminate it throughout the modern world. These teachers include B. K. S. Iyengar, founder of Iyengar Yoga; Sri K. Pattabhi Jois, who created a more dynamic and vigorous practice known as Ashtanga Vinyasa, and T. K. V. Desikachar, the son of Krishnamacharya who created the system of Viniyoga. As these new styles became popular in the Western world, even more yoga methods and techniques began to branch out, including Power Yoga and Vinyasa Flow.

According to my Ashtanga Yoga teacher, Tim Miller, **the asana practice ascended to prominence in modern yoga starting with Krishnamacharya**, and although there were many other teachers developing asana at the same time (particularly in northern India), we will refer to the Krishnamacharya lineage as it is the history I most identify with.

Referring back to the Yoga Sutras, one of my favorite Sanskrit teachings reads: "Sthira Sukham Asanam," which means that **the seated posture should be both stable and comfortable**. This statement hinges on the idea that stability and comfort are necessary elements for breathing and meditating, and the goal of the asana practice is to prepare the body for these two skills. The meditator must sit with good posture and stability, and so the body must be supple in order to maintain this position over an extended period of time. Furthermore, when asana is performed correctly, the practice contributes to **mental strength, stamina, and tolerance of stressful situations**.

From my own perspective, the practice of asana greatly contributes to creating equilibrium and balance within the body. The addition of maintaining an even breath stimulates a state of harmony and calmness in the mind that elevates the practice from physical exercise to "meditation in action." The many benefits of practicing postural yoga include:
- Increased suppleness, balance, and alignment
- Increased flexibility in the spine (you are only as young as your spine is flexible!)
- Enhanced functioning of the internal organs and digestive system, as well as the respiratory and reproductive systems
- Enhanced concentration and oxygenation of the brain
- Toning of the muscles and vagus nerve

This list could go on and on, but I think you get the point!

Although yoga is widely thought of as a form of exercise (and produces many of the same physical benefits), **one of the more profound benefits of the practice comes from the combination of slow, steady breathing with deep movement and holding of postures.**

Each yoga teacher and practitioner probably has their own unique definition of the asana practice, as it is subject to individual experience

, but in my experience, the main purpose of asana is to wake up the intelligence of the body through internal exploration.

When I say "intelligence of the body," I am referring to **movement awareness developed over time**. This awareness allows us to be more sensitive to the many subtle actions and energies working inside the body. Eventually, each individual posture will tell us something different about the body if we know how to listen properly. As we progress in the asana practice, our attention transitions away from the body's "external form" (composed of structural material like muscle and bone) to its "internal form" — breath, energy, and sensation.

The physical body is a powerful tool of external exploration, and it is through this wonderful vehicle that we may see, hear, touch, smell, and taste the world around us. In unison, these magical tools allow us to experience life. It is also through this vehicle that we may explore our inner spiritual worlds.

In order to fully understand the significance of the asana practice, we must look at our bodies as bundles of energy. According to Indian spiritual knowledge, **the human body contains 92,000 channels of energy**, known as "nadis" in Sanskrit. We use the asana practice to purify these energy pathways and remove any blockages. The body also contains seven "chakras", or focal point of energy arranged vertically along its central axis. Therefore, the intention of postural yoga is to open and align these focal points to allow energy to flow freely within the "subtle" or energetic body.

> "Many people experience the release of emotions or the recollection of old memories from practicing yoga postures. The reason for this is quite simple: our body remembers, sometimes much more vividly than our mind."
> - Eddie Stern, One Simple Thing

Forward Bends: The main goal of these postures is to improve the functioning of the digestive system, stimulate the liver and kidneys, and elongate the spine. In regard to the therapeutic purpose of the practice, healing the digestive system is the first step in purifying the body. In this course, we focus on both seated and standing postures. Lastly, this group of postures contributes to building a strong, healthy foundation for the remaining postures, as they improve flexibility in the back and legs.

Twisting Postures: These postures improve rotation and overall flexibility of the spine. Twisting postures are also meant to improve digestive function, and can even help reduce back pain (depending on your individual circumstances).

Hip Openers: These are some of the most beneficial postures in the broader asana practice, as they can improve circulation, range of motion, and reduce stress on the lower back. Hip opening postures are meant to release blockages and create an energetic shift within the body, as many negative emotions are thought to be stored in this region.

Balancing Postures: These poses can be very helpful for increasing concentration and focus. They develop the trunk and tone the muscles of the core, thereby improving alignment and suppleness in the body. Balancing postures serve as valuable metaphors for staying calm and steady in challenging situations.

Backbends: These are more advanced postures that work deep into the nervous system, which may greatly benefit our mental and emotional states. Backbends also increase strength in the deep muscles of the trunk, and bring the spine into a more neutral (not over-extended) position.

Inversions: One of my teachers used to say that inversions are the "kings and queens" of the yoga practice. When Krishnamacharya was asked which postures we should hold onto as we age, he said inversions and sun salutations were the most important ones. Inversions are highly valued for their brain-oxygenating effect, which can improve concentration and the capacity to meditate effectively. Furthermore, inversions strengthen the trunk and core, and allow the heart a moment to rest.

Sun Salutations: In the traditional method, we find sun salutations at the beginning of the practice. This is because sun salutations warm up nearly every muscle in the body. They also improve cardiovascular function and prevent fatigue and malaise.

Tips for practicing the asanas:
- The best time to practice is early in the morning or in the late afternoon.
- Always try to practice on an empty stomach.
- It is best to practice on a flat surface in a clean and quiet space with good lighting and ventilation.
- It is a good idea to shower before practicing in order to relax and prepare the muscles. Also, avoid using perfume, essential oil, or body lotion during the practice.
- Do not practice if you have been in the sun for an extended period. Make sure to hydrate!

For the purpose of this course, all movement postures should be practiced with the nostrils open and the mouth closed. We will cover breathing techniques in more detail in the next chapter, but for the meantime, try not to restrict your breathing while moving through the asana practice.

Another important thing to mention in reference to asana is that the practice doesn't need to be advanced, complex, or even lengthy for you to reap its many benefits. A simple practice of just ten postures done well (with proper breathing) can go a long way.

We get ourselves into trouble when we approach this Eastern spiritual system with a Western way of thinking. Let's not forget that **the original intent of the asana practice was to keep the body healthy, increase longevity, and prepare the body and mind for extended periods of seated meditation**. The intent was not to use asana as a means of rigorous exercise in the vein of Western standards of fitness and beauty.

Just like many other physical and spiritual disciplines that exist in the world, yoga has changed and been adapted to suit the needs of many different modern-day societies. However, as the practice evolves, it is important to remember its roots, origin, and original intention. We Westerners would do well to remember that **yoga is not about improving our external form; it is about having an internal experience.** During this internal journey, we may also achieve some level of physical mastery — not to feed the Ego, but to explore the limitations and boundaries of the mind.

Decades ago, when I first started practicing yoga, one of my teachers said something that still rings true in my mind today:

> "The practice of asana is about turning the impossible into the possible, and the possible into the graceful."

And as a final note, we must learn to enjoy this process without focusing too much on our expectations or the end result.

> "Everything you'll ever need to know is within you; the secrets of the universe are imprinted on the cells of your body."
> - Dan Millman, Way of the Peaceful Warrior

"Watch your thoughts, they become your words;
watch your words, they become your actions;
watch your actions, they become your habits;
watch your habits, they become your character;
watch your character, it becomes your destiny."

- Lao Tzu

Bodhi
SURF+YOGA

Part IV

Pranayama

Breath Control

PRANAYAMA

BREATHING TECHNIQUES

"WE LIVE IN AN OCEAN OF AIR LIKE FISH IN A BODY OF WATER. BY OUR BREATHING WE ARE ATTUNED TO OUR ATMOSPHERE. IF WE INHIBIT OUR BREATHING WE ISOLATE OURSELVES FROM THE MEDIUM IN WHICH WE EXIST. IN ALL ORIENTAL AND MYSTIC PHILOSOPHIES, THE BREATH HOLDS THE SECRET TO THE HIGHEST BLISS."
- ALEXANDER LOWEN

In very basic terms, practicing "Pranayama" means controlling the movement of the breath — the inhalation, exhalation, and pausing (or holding) of the breath. In Sanskrit, the term "prana" means "vital energy", while "yama" means "to extend". Therefore, we can understand pranayama as **"the extension of one's vital energy."**

But what exactly is prana, or vital energy? Seasoned yogis (like myself) could probably speak for hours on this very subject, but in a nutshell, **prana is what keeps us alive**. The overall health and strength of the immune system depends on the amount of prana stored in the body, which fluctuates throughout our lives depending on our circumstances.

So how does one increase the amount of prana in their body? First of all, try turning your attention toward nature and allow yourself to be nourished by it, for prana is the invisible (yet obvious) link that connects all living things in the vast web of life. Next, make sure to rest and restore both body and mind. You can do this by slowing down, meditating, and ensuring that you get adequate sleep each night.

Healthy eating is also very important. As Michael Pollan likes to say:

"Eat food, not too much, mostly plants." Locally-sourced organic fruits and vegetables are chock-full with prana.

Other methods for increasing your prana include spending time with people that raise your vibration (while avoiding toxic relationships), observing your thoughts, working (in moderation), serving others from a place of genuine compassion, and of course pranayama (breathwork).

Improving your breath control brings many benefits and serves as an effective tool for reducing stress and anxiety, increasing focus, and restoring peace and calm. Breathing techniques reduce the amount of work the heart needs to do by making it stronger and more efficient. By improving the cardiac rhythm, breathwork can relax the nervous system and ultimately make you feel better. Furthermore, proper breathing increases the amount of oxygen in the bloodstream, which can improve digestive function, metabolism, and even encourages weight loss. And for athletes, better breathing means better physical fitness and mental concentration.

Let's talk a little bit more about this last benefit — concentration. **One of my favorite aspects of pranayama is how it improves my ability to concentrate.** If you were to sit down right now, close your eyes, and focus only on breathing slowly through your nose (with your mouth shut), you would notice your mind shift directly into the present moment. Furthermore, if you take a brief pause between each inhale and exhale, you might even notice your mind go blank as you focus on this fleeting pause.

Over time, this experience becomes deeply satisfying. A tremendous yoga teacher once said, **"Yoga is the pause between two breaths."** In yoga, this pause is referred to as Kevala Kumbhaka — when inhalation and exhalation are suspended at will. As you continue this practice, this moment can be suspended for longer and longer, but that takes much work and experience.

Things to consider while performing breathing exercises:
- For starters, simply observe your breath. Try to slow down the pace of your breathing.
- Notice the many qualities of your breath: the speed, the starts and stops.
- Identify any blockages. If you feel pain, tension, or weakness in any part of the body, try breathing into that region. As your breath moves through these areas, try relaxing the surrounding muscles, organs, and bones.
- Take a pause between inhalations and exhalations. If you are new to this practice, note that this pause doesn't have to be long or strenuous — two seconds will do the trick.
- As you exhale, try to visualize yourself releasing any blockages that exist.
- Notice any change in temperature as you breathe in and out.
- There are many details of the breath that we rarely pay attention to. This is a great opportunity to discover these details!

Over the course of a day, I experience many moments that I like to call "transition times". When I am feeling stressed, overwhelmed, tired,

or simply have to transition from one activity to the next, I make sure to take a brief moment (wherever I am) to close my eyes and focus on my breath. This intentional transition moment serves to change my state of mind.

In the context of yoga, pranayama has a purifying force on the mind that may also cultivate self-discipline:

According to the Yoga Sutras, a veil of mental darkness blocks the light within. The intention of pranayama is to remove this veil and allow the mind to become clear and fit for concentration. Therefore, pranayama's promotion of physical health and well-being is an ancillary benefit: the main purpose of concentrated breathing is to control the undulations of the mind and regulate prana. (Sri Swami Satchidananda, The Breath of Life: Integral Yoga Pranayama).

Recommended sitting position for pranayama: Any seated posture is good for pranayama as long as you keep your spine straight and your body relaxed. The traditional seated position is on the floor with legs crossed in lotus position. However, this position can be difficult for people with tight hips. The idea is to feel comfortable and be able to maintain the position without experiencing pain in the body. Sitting on a bolster or a chair may also be helpful.

When to practice: Pranayama is best practiced on an empty stomach. In the traditional method, pranayama is practiced very early in the morning, during Brahma Muhurta time: about 90-minutes before sunrise . Although it is best to practice early, it is not absolutely necessary. You can also practice pranayama in the late afternoon or evening, but make sure this is a time when you can actually relax!

Furthermore, if you like to start your mornings with coffee or tea, note that caffeine (or any other stimulant) will alter the nervous system and make it harder to achieve full relaxation.

Pranayama techniques: "Some students are in a hurry to begin 'real' pranayama. They go right to the later stages without first laying a quality foundation, and their practice often suffers. First find out what is. This is also part of the answer to the question 'Who am I?'" - Richard Rosen, The Yoga of Breath: A Step-by-Step Guide to Pranayama

Ujjayi (hissing) Breath: Also called "victorious breath", this technique is practiced by constricting the throat as if you had a thin straw inside, creating a whispering sound reminiscent of ocean waves crashing on shore. For each ujjayi breath, you must keep your lips sealed as you allow the air to enter through your nose while bringing attention to the throat.

As you breathe, it is very important to bring attention to your face to make sure you are not holding any tension. Focus on relaxing your jaw and hollowing/softening the palate. This technique should be relaxing yet energizing at the same time.

Ujjayi breath is commonly applied in the Ashtanga Vinyasa system, and is the essence of the asana practice. When practicing asana, maintaining the ujjayi breath is an important aspect of guiding each movement, as we consciously finish each breath before moving to the next posture.

The aim should be to keep the ujjayi sound smooth and even. This gentle sound helps your mind to focus and move inward.

Nadi Shodhana: In Sanskrit, the term "nadi" means "channel" or "flow", and "shodhana" means "purification". So altogether this phrase translates to "purification of the internal energy." This practice is also known as alternate nostril breathing. I have included an explanation of this technique below:

"To perform nadi shodhana, make a loose fist with the right hand. Extend the thumb and the last two fingers. Close off the right nostril by pressing against the side of the nostril with the thumb. Exhale slowly and deeply through the left nostril, and then begin a deep inhalation through the same nostril. Now close off the left nostril by pressing against the side of the nostril with the last two fingers. Release the thumb so you may exhale slowly and deeply through the right nostril. Now inhale through the right nostril. Once again, close off your right nostril with the extended thumb and begin to exhale through your left nostril. Continue your breathing by inhaling through the same nostril and then change to the other side. The pattern is: exhale, inhale, and switch. Exhale, inhale, and switch. Remember to make your breathing full and deep, starting each inhalation by relaxing the abdomen and allowing it to expand, and continuing while expanding the rib cage, and then the upper chest until the collarbones rise slightly. Then exhaling slowly, first dropping the collarbones, then contracting the chest, and then the abdomen — one section flowing into the other. End your practice with an exhalation through the right nostril." (Sri Swami Satchidananda, The Breath of Life: Integral Yoga Pranayama).

This is a good method for calming the nervous system and cultivating alertness. Additionally, this technique is thought to synchronize the two hemispheres of the brain and reduce stress and anxiety.

There are several other breathing techniques in the yoga practice, but from personal experience, these techniques should be performed under the guidance of a teacher who knows your breathing capacity and is aware of any weaknesses that may affect your practice.

Advanced pranayama techniques should not be taken lightly. If we don't practice correctly, they might alter our mental and emotional states in a negative way. Therefore, it is always a good idea to practice under the guidance of a teacher.

Asana, Pranayama, and the Vagus Nerve: Recent research shows that one of the main reasons for yoga's effectiveness in reducing stress and anxiety is its capacity to "tone the

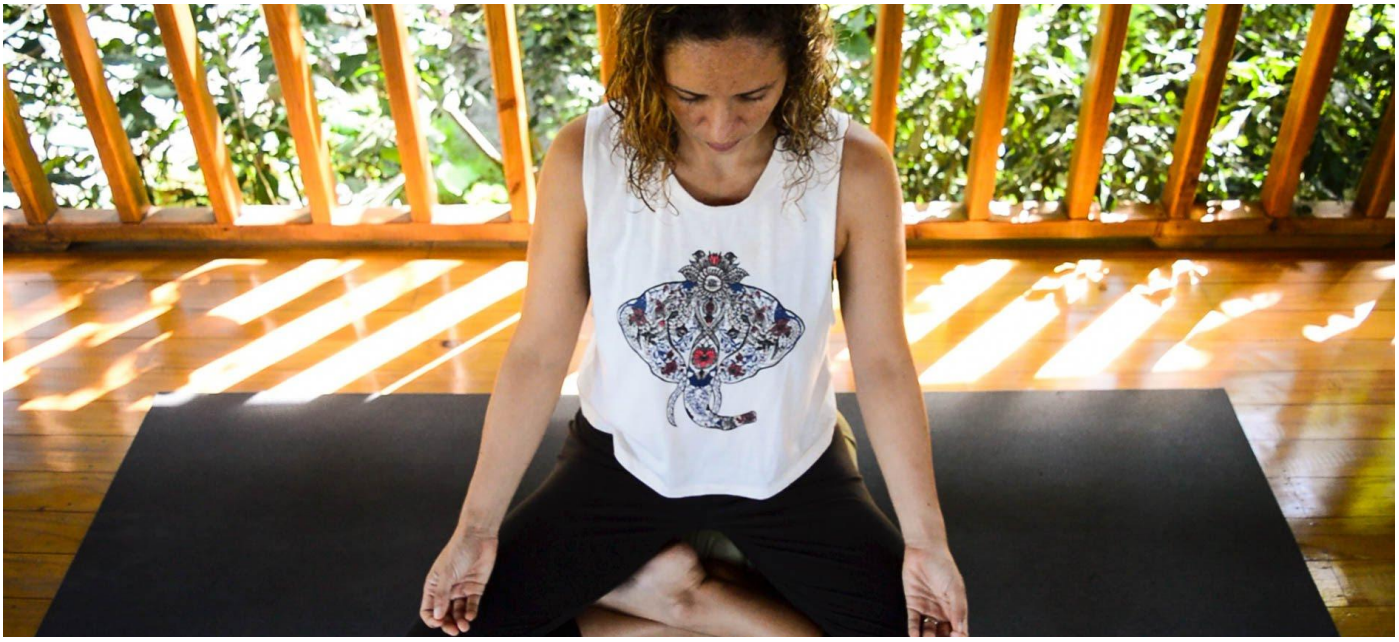
vagus nerve." It seems that the combination of asana practice, proper breathing techniques, and meditation (especially vipassana, or loving-kindness meditation), has a positive effect on the vagus nerve — **the largest cranial nerve responsible for relaying messages between the brain and the respiratory, digestive, and nervous systems.** Your breathing, digestion, and heart rate are all monitored by the vagus nerve, and it is this specific neural pathway that facilitates your ability to find calm. This nerve activates the "relaxation response" of the parasympathetic nervous system, which in turn decreases anxiety, stress, and inflammation. If the vagus nerve isn't firing properly, it can not only increase stress and anxiety, but also create digestive issues and weaken the immune system.

Many asana postures tone the vagus nerve by fostering full diaphragmatic breaths that are both smooth and steady. Belly breathing should feel easy and calming. Furthermore, the concept of resonance breathing is achieved when your sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems come into harmonic balance. It's important to note that **"resonance" is the scientific word for when heart rate, heart rate variability, blood pressure, and brainwave function all operate on the same frequency.**

Resonance Breathing:

1. Start by simply observing the breath.
2. Then, begin to slow the inhales and elongate the exhales.
3. Choose a length of time (in seconds) that works best for you. You can count in your head if that helps:
    a. Inhale for 4, exhale for 6
    b. Inhale for 5, exhale for 5
    c. Inhale for 6, exhale for 6
    d. Inhale for 5, exhale for 7

Keep the breath smooth as you count. Notice how you feel after just a few minutes. What is the state of your mind? **Allow the calm to permeate throughout your being.**



Bodhi
SURF+YOGA

Part V

The Final Four Limbs

Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana & Samadhi

"It all begins and ends in your mind. What you give power to, has power over you, if you allow it."
- Leon Brown

THE FINAL FOUR LIMBS

PRATYAHARA

CONTROL OF THE SENSES

"WHAT YOU RESIST, PERSISTS."
- CARL JUNG

The fifth limb of the eightfold path of Ashtanga is "Pratyahara", which means "to withdraw". In the context of yoga, this "withdrawal" occurs in relation to the senses, meaning that **we must practice non-attachment to sensory stimulation.**

Practicing non-attachment may sound easy in theory, but is actually quite difficult to apply in real life. How do we prevent ourselves from becoming attached to certain people or feelings? Of course we want our loved ones to be free and independent, but we often cling to them because we are afraid to lose what we have.

As easy as it is to get attached to people, we also tend to hold on to material possessions and sensorial distractions. Have you ever had trouble getting rid of clothes that may have been special to you in the past, or getting rid of something that was given to you as a gift? Do you crave sweets, affection, or maybe even the rush of adrenaline? How can we draw our senses inward without craving or attaching?

Many emotional imbalances can be attributed to our own thoughts and actions. When we allow ourselves to be influenced by things outside of our control, we expend unnecessary energy by reacting and/or suppressing unwarranted emotions. **Focusing on the uncontrollables only makes it more difficult to achieve inner peace and tranquility.**

In a sense, **yoga is nothing more than a process which enables us to stop and look at the inner workings of our own minds**. This process deepens our understanding of the nature of happiness and sadness, and allows us to transcend them both. Practicing non-attachment becomes easier when we are aware of the first four limbs of Ashtanga (yama, niyama, asana, and pranayama). For example, through the practice of asana and pranayama, we purify our bodies and minds until cravings

and attachments diminish in strength and become easier to resist. Simply put, pratyahara becomes more natural the further we dedicate ourselves to the yoga practice.

Although this practice looks a lot like meditation, **I consider it to be more of a pre-meditation**. As we sit in silence, we are able to observe the behavior of the mind. Have you ever sat down to meditate and all of the sudden you start noticing your discomfort? Something itches, something in the body hurts, your mind is jumping from one place to another: Did I remember to turn off the stove? What should I have for breakfast? What do I want to do with the rest of my life? This tumultuous movement of the mind happens all the time, and we often become aware of this fact when we sit to meditate. Therefore, **we start with pratyahara** by observing those impulses and letting them go.

In summary, pratyahara is a process of continuous observation of the senses, including our impulses and cravings. Non-attachment is by no means an easy practice, but when we learn to draw our senses within, we do not allow things to affect us so easily. **When we observe and understand them, we relinquish their control over our lives.**

Ultimately, we will be able to love the people we love in a way that makes them feel free, and we too will feel free. This makes the dedication and practice worthwhile. Holding on to sensations will only disturb our inner peace. Instead, if we conserve that energy for something beneficial we can free both ourselves and the people around us. **We have the power to create our own balance and happiness in life.**

Bodhi Surf + Yoga, Bahia Ballena, Osa, Costa Rica
Photo by Melissa Rejeb

THE FINAL FOUR LIMBS

DHARANA

CONCENTRATION OF THE MIND

"In meditation we discover our inherent restlessness. Sometimes we get up and leave. Sometimes we sit there but our bodies wiggle and squirm and our minds go far away. This can be so uncomfortable that we feel it's impossible to stay. Yet this feeling can teach us not just about ourselves but what it is to be human... we really don't want to stay with the nakedness of our present experience. It goes against the grain to stay present. These are the times when only gentleness and a sense of humor can give us the strength to settle down... so whenever we wander off, we gently encourage ourselves to 'stay' and settle down. Are we experiencing restlessness? Stay! Are fear and loathing out of control? Stay! Aching knees and throbbing back? Stay! What's for lunch? Stay! I can't stand this another minute! Stay!" (Pema Chödrön, The Places That Scare You: A Guide to Fearlessness in Difficult Times).

"Dharana", which translates to "concentration of the mind", is the sixth limb of the eightfold path and the first level of meditation. Often, I have students tell me that they are intimidated by the concept of meditation. They tell me their minds are restless and they have trouble turning off their thoughts. I always respond by telling my students that **meditation is a process, one that begins with learning how to slow down, concentrate, and pay attention to what we are thinking and why.**

Dharana is similar to pratyahara in that it is a stage we reach only when our minds are ready for it. The ability to concentrate relies on the mind being still, allowing us to achieve a state of complete momentary absorption. Asana and pranayama are great tools for calming the mind, but meditation still takes years of practice for most people. This is why we always start our yoga practice with asana, allowing the rest to follow.

When practicing dharana, we must focus our attention in one direction, rather than allowing the mind to race. In order to steady the mind, it helps to focus on something specific. When the mind has become purified by the physical yoga practice, it is then able to focus efficiently on

one subject or point of experience — a great potential for inner healing.

Simply being aware of how the mind works and how you can influence it is a huge step for personal growth, but you must first acknowledge that you are not your thoughts, feelings, or emotions. Therefore, meditation begins outside of meditation. It starts by constantly observing your thoughts, how you are moving, talking, and reacting. It starts by developing a state of constant awareness by being present in everything that you do.

I recently heard from an Ayurveda teacher that we should try performing menial tasks with care and mindfulness in order to train the mind and prepare for meditation. She presented the example of washing dishes (a task she really disliked), which she started doing with more concentration and care. Her new attitude toward dishwashing allowed her to ignore negative mental impulses that weren't contributing to her wellbeing or the wellbeing of others. **By doing common chores uncommonly well, we prepare the mind for the sometimes uncomfortable task of sitting in meditation.**

The modern human mind trends toward restlessness, what my teacher refers to as "the monkey mind". Over the years, I have had several students tell me they don't like meditation because they simply can't do it. Let us not forget that meditation, like many other practices, has a long learning process — we have to train the mind. There is no spontaneous moment when we are able to sit and immediately find a state of "Samadhi". We must first grant ourselves the time and space to be with our thoughts and see what is really going on.

All we can do is continue the practice and be open to improvement. The ability to concentrate comes with time — whether it takes a month, a year, or a decade. Remember that it is the journey that matters, not the destination.

Bodhi Surf + Yoga, Bahia Ballena, Osa, Costa Rica
Photo by Melissa Rejeb

THE FINAL FOUR LIMBS

DHYANA

MEDITATION

"WE ARE SHAPED BY OUR THOUGHTS; WE BECOME WHAT WE THINK. WHEN THE MIND IS PURE, JOY FOLLOWS LIKE A SHADOW THAT NEVER LEAVES."
- BUDDHA

Feeling sad or frustrated? Meditate on it. Having to make a difficult decision? Meditate on it. Questioning the meaning of life? Meditate on it. Take a long, deep breath. "Everything's gonna be alright."

"Dhyana", the seventh limb in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, focuses on training the mind, otherwise known as meditation. Meditation is the practice of quieting and calming the mind by turning the focus inward, which can take on many different forms: walking in nature, listening to the sound of waves crashing, or performing your morning routine.

Dhyana is a mental state (like pratyahara and dharana) that can be reached by concentrating the mind on a single focal point. When we focus the mind by concentrating on an object, the mind is often transformed into the shape of that object. For some, meditation becomes a useful tool in nearly every situation, but the meditative state can take many years to attain. Simply sitting still with your eyes closed for a couple of minutes seldom does the trick.

According to history, the original goal of yoga was for the practitioner to be able to sit in Padmasana (lotus pose) and meditate. That is one of the many reasons why we start the yoga practice with asana: we must first be able to sit comfortably before we are able to fully concentrate.

When the body starts to ache or the legs fall asleep, then all we can think about is moving and changing our position, causing us to lose our focus and sense of inner peace. If sitting in a lotus pose, half lotus, or even cross-legged brings a lot of discomfort, we can sit on a chair or against a wall. The important thing is to keep the spine straight.

There are many avenues for beginning the meditation practice, but the one I recommend is **simply bringing awareness to the breath**. At some point, the mind will start to wander, so remember to always bring the attention back to the breath — in and out.

Lastly, it helps to follow a guided meditation. I recommend listening to one or both of the following teachers:
- Thanissaro Bhikkhu (https://www.dhammatalks.org/)
- Tara Brach (https://www.tarabrach.com/)

If any of these concepts resonate with you, I recommend writing out notes, observations, and further ideas.

NOTES

Bodhi Surf + Yoga, Bahia Ballena, Osa, Costa Rica
Photo by Hannah Walsh

THE FINAL FOUR LIMBS

SAMADHI

CONTEMPLATION

"OUR TRUE HOME IS IN THE PRESENT MOMENT. TO LIVE IN THE PRESENT MOMENT IS A MIRACLE. THE MIRACLE IS NOT TO WALK ON WATER. THE MIRACLE IS TO WALK ON THE GREEN EARTH IN THE PRESENT MOMENT, TO APPRECIATE THE PEACE AND BEAUTY THAT ARE AVAILABLE NOW. PEACE IS ALL AROUND US — IN THE WORLD AND IN NATURE — AND WITHIN US — IN OUR BODIES AND OUR SPIRITS. ONCE WE LEARN TO TOUCH THIS PEACE,WE WILL BE HEALED AND TRANSFORMED. IT IS NOT A MATTER OF FAITH; IT IS A MATTER OF PRACTICE."
- THICH NHAT HAN

The practice of pratyahara (withdrawal of the senses) prepares the field for dharana (concentration), and dharana eventually develops into dhyana (meditation). Finally, perfecting dhyana leads us to "samadhi", the final limb in the eightfold path. **Samadhi is a deep state of consciousness known as contemplation.**

In all honesty, there is not much I can say about samadhi from personal experience, as it is a mental state that I have yet to attain. However, according to the Yoga Sutras, this state is signified by a feeling of emptiness, due to the cessation of all thoughts and/or impulses of the mind.

This final limb of the Ashtanga path circles back to the primary definition of yoga, which is stated in the second sutra: "Yoga citta vritti Nirodhah." This sutra defines yoga as the cessation of the mind's many fluctuations. According to traditional understanding, **the ultimate goal of the yoga path is to liberate the mind (Kaivalya) – a state of complete inner freedom.**

However, this doesn't mean that every yoga practitioner must strive to achieve this goal. If you were to explore the fourth chapter of the Yoga Sutras, you would learn that any yogi or yogini that advances along the yoga path enters into ever-deepening states of consciousness. Devoted practitioners (such as those who have been practicing yoga for decades in the

Himalayas) may even acquire various “siddhis” or “vibhutis”, aka superpowers.

Whether you believe in superpowers or not, the more you learn to utilize your breath, train your mind via meditation, strengthen your body with asana, and so on, the easier it becomes to practice the yamas and niyamas. In this way, we come full circle by serving others and enjoying the simple beauty of being alive. This is how yoga transitions from a physical practice to a transformative experience. **By following the eightfold path – a wonderful journey from the head to the heart – we may in fact discover that we have superpowers ready to be released.**

- We may begin to honor the fact that we have been given this body as an instrument for experiencing (and enjoying) life. We no longer look at this sacred tool and judge it by its shape, or by what it can or can’t do, but instead allow it to work as an instrument for peace and harmony. We may recognize the power of this beautiful vessel to serve others with compassion and integrity.
- We may become aware of the healing powers of our breath, and how breathing affects every aspect of our being. We may use the breath to find calmness and serenity when necessary, allowing it to positively change the outcome of almost every situation.
- We may realize that when the mind finds silence, we are able to listen to the heart. We then realize that we are holding the key to our own happiness, and by opening that space we allow our loved ones to be happy and free as well.
- We may not be able to fly or walk on water, but maybe we can learn to walk on this Earth in peace and appreciate every moment for what it is.

These are the gifts that may be attained during the yoga journey: to lead a life full of presence and compassion.

LOKAH SAMASTAH SUKHINO BHAVANTU

“MAY ALL LIVING CREATURES FIND PEACE AND HAPPINESS IN THIS WORLD. MAY MY ACTIONS, WORDS, AND THOUGHTS CONTRIBUTE TO THE PEACE AND HAPPINESS OF OTHERS.”

SHANTI, SHANTI, OMMMMM

In the End

by Tara Mohr

In the end
you won't be known
for the things you did,
or what you built,
or what you said.

You won't even be known
for the love given
nor the hearts saved,

because in the end you won't be known.

You won't be asked, by a vast creator full of light:
What did you do to be known?

You will be asked: Did you know it,
this place, this journey?

What there is to know can't be written.
Something between the crispness of air
and the glint in her eye
and the texture of the orange peel.

What you'll want a thousand years from now is this:
a memory that beats like a heart—a travel memory, of what it was to walk here,
alive and warm and textured within.

Sweet brightness, aliveness, take-me-now-ness that is life.

You are here to pay attention. That is enough.

Bodhi
SURF+YOGA

Conclusion

"Any path is only a path, and there is no affront, to oneself or to others, in dropping it if that is what your heart tells you. . . . Look at every path closely and deliberately. Try it as many times as you think necessary. Then ask yourself, and yourself alone, one question. . . . Does this path have a heart? If it does, the path is good; if it doesn't it is of no use."
- Carlos Castaneda, The Teachings of Don Juan- Leon Brown

CLOSING THOUGHTS & RESOURCES

NOW THE JOURNEY IS YOURS...

We have finally reached the end of the information regarding the Eight Limbs of Yoga, and you can now begin your personal journey.

Yoga can be a very transformative experience, but it takes time and dedication. Over the years, I have noticed that my definition of yoga has changed several times, which has taught me that yoga can shift based on what you want or need it to be, and there's no right or wrong on this matter.

In my early 20s, yoga was a very physical experience, but also provided me with insight and a sense of calm and presence. At that stage in my life, I needed a physical and challenging practice to somehow quiet my mind (at least a little), and meditation was far too ambitious for my monkey mind.

When I reached my 30s, my yoga practice shifted to support the many challenges of "adult life". As soon as I turned 30, my life started to be very uphill — I moved to a new place, got married, built a family and a business — and with that, many expected and unexpected challenges arose. So the intention of my practice shifted to focus on building energy, stamina, and concentration. Although I maintained a vigorous physical practice, I began to pay more attention to the philosophical aspects of yoga; I started to practice yoga off the mat.

Now that I am in my 40s, the asana practice is still an important part of my life, but I feel more settled into the pace of life now. My previous desire to "be someone", or to achieve this or that has melted away. My curious attitude toward life's mysteries has blossomed again, and I tend to gravitate more toward exploring the depths and dark corners of my mind. At this stage, I am leaning more towards exploring my mind, my thoughts, and my actions rather than my physical capabilities. Meditation has become the focal point of my practice.

My priorities may shift once more, and that is okay. The yoga path has many different stages, and so being in-tune with what you need in this moment is a key element of the yoga practice. Yoga is a personal journey, and no one else can do it for you. A teacher may guide and correct you through various postures, remind you to breathe properly, and share his or her knowledge of yoga philosophy and meditation,

but you are the one who takes the journey.

Yes, we each cultivate a different perspective and understanding of what yoga is and what it can do for us, and it is nice to think that we all have unique experiences. The path of self-exploration starts by questioning our Ego's, fears, and societal conditioning so that we may eventually break free in the pursuit of self-knowledge. We must peel back many layers to reach the deep core of our existence, and to do so we use every possible tool there is — our behaviours, our values, our bodies and minds, and the deepest level of our spirit.

I hope you enjoyed this journey as much as I did. I dedicate this to each and everyone of you because we are all in this journey together (even if we venture along different paths). May this knowledge and practice allow us to transcend the boundaries of our minds and overcome the fears that separate us from one another. May this practice also serve to reconnect us to the most divine source of energy that exists: Mother Nature. And finally, may this practice connect all of us to the purest and most truthful essence of our beings: LOVE.

Regardless of the approach, technique, method or order of our yoga journey, when we walk the path we all eventually reach the same destination — our hearts. Yoga is the journey from the head to the heart.

NAMASTE!

"MY SOUL HONORS YOUR SOUL. I HONOR THE PLACE IN YOU WHERE THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE RESIDES. I HONOR THE LIGHT, LOVE, TRUTH, BEAUTY AND PEACE WITHIN YOU, BECAUSE IT IS ALSO WITHIN ME. IN SHARING THESE THINGS WE ARE UNITED, WE ARE THE SAME, WE ARE ONE."

RECOMMENDED BOOKS & RESOURCES...

- Yoga Sutras of Patanjali by Sri Swami Satchidananda
- The Eight Limbs of Yoga: A Handbook for Living Yoga Philosophy by Stuart Ray Sarbacker & Kevin Kimple
- The Yamas & Niyamas: Exploring Yoga's Ethical Practice by Deborah Adele
- The Breath of Life: Integral Yoga Pranayama: Step-by-Step Instructions in the Yogic Breathing Practices by Sri Swami Satchidananda
- One Simple Thing: A New Look at the Science of Yoga and How It Can Transform Your Life by Eddie Stern
- Light on Yoga: The Bible of Modern Yoga by B. K. S. Iyengar
- Light on Life: The Yoga Journey to Wholeness, Inner Peace, and Ultimate Freedom by B. K. S. Iyengar
- The Art of Vinyasa: Awakening Body and Mind Through the Practice of Ashtanga Yoga by Richard Freeman & Mary Taylor

OTHER BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS...

- Tao Te Ching by Lao Tzu
- Tao Te Ching: A New English Version by Stephen Mitchell
- Living Gita by Sri Swami Satchidananda
- The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment by Eckhart Tolle
- The Places that Scare You: A Guide to Fearlessness in Difficult Times by Pema Chodron