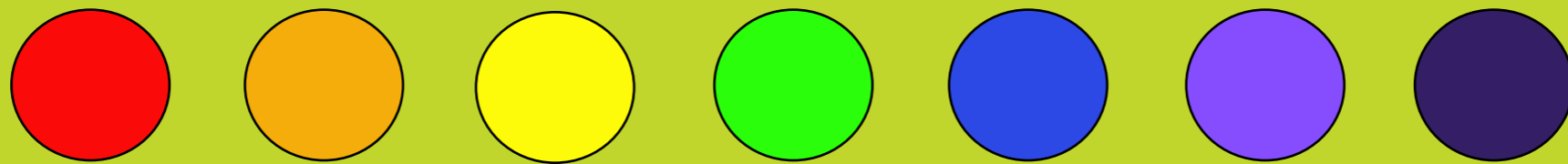


The Unconventional Beginner's Guide to Yoga



By Ashley Josephine Herzberger

To Mom & Dad

Thanks for letting me be me and raising me to think for myself.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	4
CHAPTER ONE: The Misconceptions	6
CHAPTER TWO: How Yoga Works	8
CHAPTER THREE: 10 Reasons Why Yoga is Scary	9
CHAPTER FOUR: The Different Styles of Yoga	11
CHAPTER FIVE: How to Stay Safe when Practicing Yoga	13
CHAPTER SIX: Everything You Need to Practice Yoga	14
CHAPTER SEVEN: Basic Yoga Poses	16
CHAPTER EIGHT: The Rules of the Yoga Studio	25
CHAPTER NINE: Beyond the Yoga Poses: Intro To Mind Training	26
CHAPTER TEN: Basic Yoga Philosophy	28
EPILOGUE	29

This is just the beginning.

Yoga is hard. Yoga is not just the physical poses. It is showing up as all of you each and every day and working through the tough shit to come out on the other side stronger, more flexible, more compassionate, wiser and happier than before. It's a discipline practice, a devotional practice and a life practice. The physical, mental and emotional rewards are worth the conscious effort.

INTRODUCTION

How come ancient people were so wise?

Considering people who lived 5,000 years ago had no electricity, could only know what the people around them knew and had no such thing as Google (gasp!), it's surprising they were so wise. Without the convenience of mass transit, very few people had the means to travel, which means worldviews were intelligent guesses at best.

Then again, with nothing better to do and no routinized distractions (think email) other than warring tribes and nations (no big deal), there were perhaps a few more hours in the day to ponder the more difficult questions in life.

It is fascinating that throughout history, despite new innovations in technology and scientific discoveries disproving long held-beliefs that shape the foundation of our lives, the quest for Truth and a connection with our soul remains one of the most puzzling questions.

These days, we don't think about it all that much except in passing. Maybe every now and then we'll ask ourselves who we really are, but more and more this question is depressing, frightening and complex. Society is bigger and the leaders who have somehow convinced masses of people to follow the same laws within certain arbitrary borders have conspired against the individual for centuries to make sure we don't think too freely lest we disrupt the status quo.

The Unconventional Yogini's Step 1 to Live Your Truth: Disrupt the status quo.

In the eyes of leaders status quo is another word for balance and peace. Make sure everyone follows the same rules, has the same moral ethics and values and everything will be peachy (read: predictable). It's when you get those wildly unpredictable souls that screw over an entire framework of thinking, a whole way of living that's been tentatively built on the blind buy-in of millions. Leaders of the status quo don't want that. Individuals thrive with that kind of thinking.

The second we are born we are enslaved into a way of thinking, being and doing, transferred to us from our parents, brought down from their parents' experiences and so on. Our world is shaped for us until we're old enough to understand that we have the power to shape the world. Too often that's just lip-service. Standard motivation. And then it's on to other, more practical matters, such as the importance of making a lot of money so that you can pay your bills working for someone else who slaved away his young years to rise to the top and expects no less (these days, even more) from you.

No one to date has found her soul in an office cubicle.

Ancient people were wise because they didn't have so many people pressuring them into believing "the way". In fact, they were the very ones coming up with "the way." If they were here today, they would expect you to do the same.

The ancients were so wise because they lived simply. It's the simple things that can teach us the most if we open our minds to them. Our minds have become so closed and so deluded and so clouded by the dirt and dust and chalky residue of generations past that we can't even begin to scratch the surface of soul searching because we're so far removed from why it even matters in the first place. And yet, there's that little pilot light somewhere in the back of our brain that continues to burn and ask us nagging questions about the meaning of life. If it weren't for the pilot light, humanity would be extinguished.

Why is The Modern Age so dumb?

So what does this soul-searching business have to do with yoga? And why such heady introduction? Because we're all starting out at the very beginning. We have to go back to the beginning to remove all the dirt. Yoga is a tool to help us do that. Yoga is about finding our true Selves and then transcending our very own prescription. Yoga is the ultimate guide to the soul.

It's better we go back to the basics, to the simplest (and yet most complex) frameworks and theories for Being seeing as we haven't yet quite come up with anything better in the past 5,000 years. We've surely come up with a lot of stuff to *do*, but haven't been able to shed a whole lot of light on how to *be*.

The problem with the modern age of thinkers is that we're incredibly caught up in convenience.

We're fighters and rebels, without a noble cause. We fight wars (still). We fight the status quo (or so we think). Our means of lashing out include inking our bodies with tattoos to piss our parents off and consuming large amounts of alcohol, powdered chemicals, pills and herbs to alter our depressing state in an attempt to escape the reality of our present circumstances.

In the modern age we're always looking for something more, while secretly hoping that external stuff will help us find the internal peace and happiness we're really seeking.

Sorry, Charlie. We'll be seeking until the end of time to find the quick, convenient object that costs X amount of dollars and will deliver us salvation at the push of a button.

Modern people may have been continuing the soul-quest, but we've been distracted by millions of bright shiny objects and we are LOST. In fact, the best we can hope for is that maybe by the end of our lives we've made it back to the path first forged by our ancient, wise ancestors.

The modern age is wonderful in a lot of ways, and I can't say I would want to live 5,000 years ago amongst the classic sages and philosophers. But it's a shame the soul-quest should die such a pithy death, buried and forgotten so easily, covered up by Playstations, Macs and Legos.

Moving Forward

I accept the worldly challenge (yes, I just bestowed myself leader) of continuing the quest. The Olympic torch has been passed down to us and now we must run with the light, however meek it may have become. The oil is running out, and it soon may extinguish - our quest for our soul may be lost forever. That day will be the dawning of the reign of robots.

I certainly don't have the answers, but I'm willing to be your guide, to pose the questions and to provide tools along your own soul-seeking journey.

Remember this, it's a journey, an adventure - not a race.

So, what is this book about?

This is a book about yoga because yoga is a paramount tool to help guide you on your journey to the soul. You know how I said that I would be honored to be your guide. I would be honored, but I kind of lied. Yoga is the real guide, I'm just the teacher who can help relay the information. Like the air traffic controller.

You're the pilot and yoga is the plane – the vehicle that will help get you where you want to go. If you don't want to go anywhere, yoga won't help you go anywhere.

This book will teach you all about the practice of yoga in its physical form – from the basic poses that will help you strengthen and tone the muscles in your body and make you feel better day in and day out to the misconceptions about the practice, why it's not a religion (however much it sounds like one), how to stay safe while practicing, the general rules you'll find in studios and out in the world, the stuff you need to bring with you on your journey (we call them props), different routes to take, plus an introduction to the philosophy behind all this craziness.

Yoga is so much more than the physical practice and I know you'll feel more fulfilled knowing that this practice can support you through the best and worst times of your life.

Yoga is very much a lifestyle, a way of life that lays out the basics and then asks us to improvise when necessary.

I'm introducing you to the physical practice because it serves as the foundation for the rest of our journey. You cannot embark upon a demanding journey without physical strength, careful preparation and street smarts. The physical practice of yoga will give you all three.

A word about paradox

Most of yoga philosophy is paradoxical in that one thing will be said and then seven chapters later, that same tenet will be denied.

Yoga is up to complete interpretation. The rules will be outlined for you, but it's up to you to put it into practice as you see fit. All of us will see "fit" in a different way. And I want you to know that this is totally okay. You are a unique individual. It is your responsibility to take what I say and laugh in my face because you don't believe a word of it. It's your responsibility to have an open mind and test these tenets to be true for you. Only then will you be able to discover the truth for yourself.

My truth is not your truth, so don't follow blindly. That's cheating and it's lazy and it won't get you anywhere. It's doing something for the sake of doing it because I told you it was a good idea. DO NOT do that. Please. Do it because you want to. Because you're curious and interested to see what happens.

There are three different kinds of wisdom in this world. You can learn wisdom from another person (me telling you something that you didn't know); you can gain wisdom by becoming an expert at something through years and years of research, experimentation and application (think your PhD college professor); or you can gain wisdom from your direct experiencing of a situation (you learn that it doesn't feel good to put your hand on the stove because it burns and causes pain, so you never do it again). Only the latter can be considered the real Truth for you. Only what you experience can be truly Known.

So don't just listen to what I have to say about all this. What I'm relaying to you is simply a combination of what I've researched, been told and experienced over the years.

Please, experience life for yourself. Put these principles to practice. If they don't work, fine. If they do, awesome.

If you find the secret to your soul, please share it with me. I'd love to hear about your journey.

I'll be sure to help give examples of things you can do to experience this wisdom throughout the book, but remember that this isn't about me. It's about you creating your own life based on this basic framework of ideas.

Of course, there will be work involved. In fact, it will be very hard work. If you're not interested in doing really hard work right now, just make sure that you save this ebook somewhere safe so that some day when you are ready, you've got this guide to get you going.

So, yoginis, you ready?

Welcome to the starting line.

CHAPTER ONE

The Misconceptions

Yoga may be one of the most misunderstood practices of all time, and it's all my fault. By that I mean, the yoga "industry" has not done a very good job of communicating to every one else in the world what yoga is all about.

There are several reasons for this lack of effective communication.

- 1) The language barrier. Yoga came from India. Not only have the poses and practices been translated from an ancient language that barely exists today, but also, all of India operates from a different mindset than your typical Western soul. Therefore, even when yoga teachers speak in plain English, the concept still sounds foreign because it is.
- 2) Adding on to the language barrier and directly related, yoga teachers have developed their own lexicon over the years (of which I have fallen victim) that they use to talk to each other and their students. This lexicon is very kind and compassionate, but despite their best intentions, mostly ignored, eye-rolled and discarded by a Western society that has no room for compassion, kindness and other high-brow concepts. The West may want to make the world a better place, but it'll do it on its own terms. America does not believe it needs to "let go" of anything, nor do we "surrender." This is the United States. The bottom line is that compassionate and kind speak are considered weak. Thus the small percentage of men you see lining up their mats for class.
- 3) So far you have a language that can't be understood because it's steeped in a different way of thinking originating from a completely foreign tongue AND the general understanding of compassion and kindness labeled as weak and of hippie-tendency by popular culture in the West. Yoga is screwed.
- 4) To top it all off, the people who eventually teach yoga are the ones who are drawn to the practice and as a general rule, the people really drawn to the practice are the people who don't excel or enjoy business, marketing and other Western jobs that require a certain skill-set (I admit, this is a sweeping generalization and not true in every case; however, it is true a large amount of the time). Thus there is virtually no way yoga teachers can communicate effectively to non-practitioners what the practice is really about because they don't know how to speak a language they've never understood. The only way non-practitioners start to understand is if they tuck their chin and dive right in. Not the most accessible way to go about things.

There's also the fact that yoga is practiced in so many different ways that it's hard to keep it all straight even if you do know what's going on. Some people like to sing, others focus on the physical benefits with zero chanting allowed.

Because I feel I have maintained a unique perspective – totally immersed in the culture of yoga but distinctly aware of the communication dissonance and equipped with a double major in Journalism and English, ample PR and marketing experience and even a slight business-mind, I feel it is my duty to explain to you what yoga really is.

To start, let's start with what it is not.

Yoga is NOT A RELIGION.

A religion is an organized group of people who worship the same deity(ies) and follow the same rules of life. In Yoga we do not worship one deity; instead, everyone worships whatever deity they wish. There is a lot of confusion around this topic since the practice of yoga originated in India and was created by Hindus. Yoga is a component of the Hindu religion – like one of the 10 commandments that must be practiced to reach heaven – but it also exists on its own outside the Hindu religion as an incredible physical, spiritual and emotional tool to connect us deeper to ourselves, our bodies and our purpose. You have to decide if that will get you any closer to heaven or enlightenment or whatever you believe in. And since yoga is not an organized, corporate structure, but rather a practice, you don't have to tithe to the "church" of yoga or worry about a governing body of yogis who are going to tell you what you can and can't do (most of the time). In that way, yoga is very freeing and accepting.

Yoga is NOT JUST FOR WOMEN.

For those who believe that the future of the world lies within the hands of women stepping into our power and leading the world, yoga has a lot to teach men about how to lead with compassionate strength.

Yoga is NOT EASY.

Don't be fooled.

Yoga is NOT A FAD.

Fads don't last 5,000+ years.

Yoga is NOT JUST FOR SKINNY GIRLS.

In yoga, we are taught not to judge. Not everyone is so good at this, but it's the basis from which we operate. So please, come join us. You can do it. And if that still doesn't motivate you, there is a whole [yoga website just for people who think their bodies aren't "perfect"](#).

Yoga is NOT ONLY PRACTICED BY FLEXIBLE PEOPLE.

I'm of the slender variety and I still have tight hamstrings. That means I won't be doing the splits anytime soon. Even flexible people feel the stretch in yoga. Also, how do you think all these bendy people got so Gumby? (If you don't know who Gumby is...well, Google Image it.) Yes, some of us are born with the natural flexibility gene, but if we don't continue working at it over time even we bendy people will become less flexible. I've gained an insane amount of flexibility in the past five years and you will too if you just make it to the mat.

Yoga is not *just* a workout, a pain relief pill, a stretch. It's not *just* meditation and breathing. It's not *just* about the body or the mind or the soul. It's an integration of your entire life. And that is damn hard shit.

You may come to yoga for one thing, but if you truly “get it,” and by that I mean experience the body, mind and soul align, then you will be forever changed. Scarred. Sold. In.

Yoga is a choice.

The choice you make each morning when you wake up to stay positive, to make the right decision, to keep the mind and body calm and to work with soul, purpose and vitality. You won't get this realization the first time you step on the mat and you most likely won't step on the mat looking for it. You'll be looking for the pain relief, the stretch, the workout, the sweat. You'll be looking for the relaxation, the calming effect, the connection to breath. You'll be looking for something else, but what you won't know is that looking for those other things is just the first step. It's the tip of the iceberg and you just aren't able to see the vast, dark, blue mass of issues underneath calling your name.

Why has no one told you this before?

No one tells you this because it's the most frightening thing on the face of the planet. I know. I've lived it and I am living it. But you know what else is frightening? I think a mid-life crisis at age 40 is frightening. I think a near-death experience brought on by exhaustion, over-work and extreme stress caused by years of plowing away at a job you hate is downright terrifying. I think that wasting your life to follow the same path as everyone else is scary and frankly, boring.

The thing is, the truth is bad for business. I've studied up on my business and my marketing and every single thing I've read tells me I should sell you what you want and give you what you need. That's why you're sold yoga as an exercise, yoga as stress-relief, yoga as (fill in the blank). And on the surface you do need that.

But you wouldn't have those problems if you were in touch with your soul. And coincidentally, yoga plops you right down on the direct path to your own damn soul. You think it's weird that yoga works for so many different things? It's not the yoga per-se; it's the soul work you're doing to get back in touch with who you are. Once that happens, all of the sudden the pain and the suffering and the stress and anxiety all goes away.

That's how yoga works.

So yeah, you're right, it is kinda weird that yoga is this miracle cure that does all kinds of things. That's why it's so confusing. How can one thing cure everything? It can't. They lied to you. We lied to you in the name of doing business. We said yoga would help you lose weight. And it did. But it also did a whole lot of other things along the way. We didn't tell you about that part. We didn't tell you that it would change your life (some of us tried). We didn't tell you that you're really participating in a workout for the soul. It's not just the body. It's not just the mind. It's the integration of all three.

Now I can understand if you're not at all interested in yoga anymore. You thought it was something easy, a quick fix that would make you look better, feel better and be a better person. Don't get me wrong. It will. But not overnight. Not after three classes. You'll feel the benefits, but the practice becomes a lifelong ritual that you do every single day. And some days you'll lose it.

Eventually it will come back.

If you're not interested in soul work, if you're not interested in becoming your best self – defining who that is and showing up as that person every day to make a real difference in the world, even if that just means that you are kind to your co-workers, compassionate to your friends and family, and friendly with your neighbors no matter what is going on in your life – then you don't have to practice my kind of yoga. You can do plenty of other yoga that will ail your surface issues.

If you ever find that you've made it to the hiding parts below the water line, I'll still be here. You're welcome any time. Sometimes, it takes a while for us to understand that life is harder than we thought it was going to be. Different than what our parents told us. Not quite the story we had imagined. It's at that moment you need a guide.

Let yoga be that guide.

CHAPTER TWO

How Yoga Works

Unlike the placebo effect of pills, yoga will only work if you do it. It's not a prescription that you take, it's physical, mental and emotional activity that you do. The work put in will reap rewards. The yoga left on the shelf will sit there and do nothing for you.

I was talking to a friend recently about her business. She wanted to know when people would come knocking on her door for her services. She didn't want to be part of "the nobody's" anymore. Well, of course none of us want to be a nobody. We want to be seen and heard!

It takes a lot of hard work to build up a business to "successful." You can't expect it's not going to take a whole lot of hard work to do the same in life. Luckily, most of yoga will make you feel better afterwards. Only sometimes will you run into the demons that make you want to run in the opposite direction.

Anytime you feel like you want to run in the opposite direction, do yourself a favor and ask yourself why. There's normally a lot of knowledge in fear. It takes courage to overcome fear.

Of course, you can do all this yoga stuff and find your soul and do nothing with it, but that would be a sure shame. All the inner work you do will transform your outer world. The transformation will at times seem like a piece of cake, and at other times seem like you're pushing a boulder up a hill. The transformation will be gradual, and I ask that you stay patient, keep with it and turn to your faith.

I don't care what you have faith in, just have faith. If you don't have faith in anything, pick something. Without faith, you'll lose your way.

Why You Shouldn't Believe A Word I Say

Now for all you natural-born skeptics out there wondering how this yoga stuff is going to help you and why you should believe what I have to say, I have this to say.

Don't believe me. In fact, I don't want anyone who reads this book to believe a word I say. I want you to try what I say and form your own opinion about it. If it feels good, great – keep doing it. If it doesn't, don't do it. Simple as that.

Yoga teaches you to trust your body and develop your intuition. Trust your intuition and you'll know what's good for you. Don't believe me because I wrote a book, have practiced seriously for 6+ years, have a few teacher certifications and read a lot. Believe yourself, your body and your soul. That will take you way further.

I know that it's really, really, really hard to do this stuff. I struggle with it every day. I love yoga and there are still days when I don't want to do the work. When I want to be lazy. Some days, I let myself be lazy. Other days, I do the work anyway. I've never heard anyone regret doing yoga – except of course if they hurt themselves, but that's really embarrassment they're feeling, be-

cause they hurt themselves doing yoga and let their ego get the best of them.

I have known plenty of people who poo-poo'd the whole thing for years before finally, begrudgingly, getting on the mat and trying it out because someone tortured them. Indeed, they always feel better afterward and are more than happy to come back.

And, I know the people who won't try it. They are stubborn. They probably take pride in it. And they'll never feel better. Don't be one of those people.

How Yoga Will Work For You Specifically

If you're the kind of person that needs to know how this is going to help you, you are going to hate what I have to say about that. I know, because I used to be one of those people who wanted everything laid out right in front of me. Yoga will work for you exactly the way it should. You can't really plan your journey – it won't work. You can only let your journey guide you, keep an open mind, ears, eyes and nose, and follow the path laid out in front of you. You can say it's God's path, or of your own creation, or the universe calling or whatever you want to say so that it makes sense to you and your belief systems.

If you try and calculate it, you won't find the answer.

I don't know your answer. Notice, it's not THE answer. It's YOUR answer. Each of us is a unique individual. There is no one THE answer for all of us. There is YOUR answer and you have to find it for yourself. I guarantee that once you do your whole life will change.

I would love to help guide you toward YOUR answer. It would be an honor and a privilege to ride with you.

If you choose to take this trip, know that I'm very proud of you just for starting. You are strong, you are courageous and you have my full support. Reach out to me anytime you need me. I'm here for you.

CHAPTER THREE

10 Reasons Why Yoga is Scary

Let us talk a little more specifically about why yoga is scary.

1. Yoga is scary because sometimes we feel like we're going to fall backward.

If we fall backward that obviously means we have failed. But if we don't fail, that means we never tried. And if we never try, we'll never know. If we never know, we're living in ignorance and a false sense of security, clinging on to a way of life that just narrowly gets us by each and every day, but eventually becomes unfulfilling.

2. Other times, we feel like we're going to fall forward.

If we happen to fall forward, we might hit our head. We might find success and not know what to do with it or how to respond. So it's best to stay upright, moving very little. Except then we won't get anywhere, because you have to move back and forth, between failure and success, to progress in business and in life.

No one falls forward unless they're crazy, and you don't want to be crazy. You just want to be normal.

News flash: Everyone wants to be normal. Do you want to be like everyone?

I personally enjoy being weird. I personally enjoy having an opinion and thinking for myself. I personally enjoy challenging the circumstances in life that don't fit nicely into the life I'm creating for myself. I haven't *created* it, because I'm constantly creating. It's always creating. Never created. If your life ever becomes created, that means you've stopped falling forward.

3. Yoga is scary because a lot of times, we have no idea what to do and we don't want to look like a fool.

So we either don't do it, or we do but refuse to laugh at ourselves lest it become apparent we've never done something before. We assume that we must automatically know everything already. Not only must we know it, but we must be a master even if we've never done it before. This is the type of pressure so many of us put on ourselves. It's a little ridiculous. Are you going to look like a fool the first time you walk into a yoga studio? You might think so. Everyone else will see a beginning yogi, excited that you're starting your journey and eager to help.

Which brings up some sub-fears.

3a. We are afraid to receive.

Anything. Help from others. Advice. Gifts. Pleasure. Kindness. Love. Because if we receive these things, it obviously means we need it. And we don't need anything because we've already got it

all figured out. If you think you are the most perfect being in the universe who already knows everything there is to know and needs no help, you'll never experience the pleasure, kindness, gifts, advice and love from other people. You'll be stuck in an existence in which it's more important to covet everything you have lest anyone steal it away from you. All your energy will be spent protecting, rather than giving. You'll refuse to feel, to experience, to give, and your soul will slowly harden and close off to the world around you. The world will then become a very scary place. Scariest than the world of yoga, even.

3b. We are also afraid that we will be judged.

Other people will label us and put us into boxes to help them understand and relate to who we are. These labels and boxes make us feel claustrophobic because we mistakenly assume that this is the only way this person will know us. Just because we are a beginner at yoga does not automatically mean we are a beginner at life. For someone with a PhD, this is an insult.

Most often, we don't give others enough credit, and we especially don't give ourselves enough credit. If the PhD walks into a yoga studio and is a true beginner, but acts like he or she already knows everything there is to know in defiance of the "beginner" label, then he leaves the door open for others to box him into other categories, such as fool, arrogant, etc. But if the PhD walks into the classroom and confidently announces that he is a beginner, asks for help and is eager to learn, understanding where he's at and fully accepting he has so much to gain, everyone will not judge him because they will not need to. He already let everyone know exactly who he was. He was a beginner. How exciting! Everyone is ready to help. To encourage and inspire. He will make friends and have a good experience. In time, he will be able to tell everyone who else he is. He who is confident will tell everyone else who he is. Then there will be no room to be judged.

4. Yoga is scary because sometimes we just don't know what to expect.

And if we don't know what to expect, then we obviously shouldn't go anywhere near it. If we always knew what to expect, life would be boring. If we were born and knew who we were going to marry, where we were going to go to college, all of the friends we would have in our entire life, as if we exited the womb and were presented a card with all our life information on it, the surprise is ruined. What is there to live for? Well, of course we can live to make money. We can live to work at our prescribed jobs. But we know when we're going to get fired. When we're going to move. When we're going to have kids. We know it all. Which means there is nothing left to know. If life is not the journey to uncover knowledge, then what is life for?

5. Yoga is scary because it asks us to feel, when the rest of the world asks us to numb.

Feeling is an incredible ability that most have us have drowned out with unnecessary noise of the mind and intellect.

For example, I experience pain when I overeat – when I eat too much of one food, when I don't exercise and when I sit around. I feel hurt physically, emotionally and mentally. I see other people overeat as well, but I don't think they know what they're really feeling. But I can't blame them because feeling is hard. When you start feeling, you are listening to the truth. Sometimes, truth is too much for the mind to handle, so you ignore the pain.

Unfortunately, if you can't feel pain, you also can't feel love. You also can't feel other positive emotions. You've numbed yourself to the world. Sure, you might have opinions, you might laugh, you might smile and appear happy. But it's not true emotion. It's a highly trained fake feeling concocted and executed by a body controlled by the mind.

We can't just feel the good emotions all the time. When someone dies, it's okay to feel sad. In front of other people. It's okay to be angry when someone does something to you that hurts you. It's okay to be in pain. It's okay. It's also okay to experience pure joy. To laugh. To experience pleasure. To love. It's okay to feel the entire spectrum of emotions – in fact, it's encouraged.

For those of us who have gone so long without feeling, without affection, without emotion, it will be very hard to get a hold of this whole feeling thing again. Think of it like a broken bone. Your entire emotional body has been in a cast, broken and helpless for years, and now, the cast is being removed and your feeling muscles have atrophied. It's going to take a lot of feeling therapy to get those muscles strong again, to get that feeling body back to healthy. You have to put in the work, or your feeling body will remain deadened and weak.

And don't be fooled by the feeling mind. The feeling mind has carefully studied society and knows when it's appropriate to be sad. Knows what that looks like and how it "goes." Knows when to press play on that track and let it rip. And then once it's done, it's done. There is no more feeling. Feeling time is over. It's time to move on to the next track.

The feeling body doesn't work that way. When the feeling body is in control, the body tells us when it's done feeling. It may take years to grieve. This is okay. The body is an intelligent being, just as much as the brain. The body knows. The body tells you what it knows, but sometimes it is very subtle and sometimes the mind doesn't want to hear it so the mind hides the letters in a locked drawer somewhere and hopes you never find it.

6. Yoga is scary because it introduces us to concepts that are in direct opposition to the belief systems that have been ingrained within us since birth.

At the outset, as an Eastern tradition, yoga is hard for the Western mind to understand. The biggest difference between yoga philosophy and western thought, especially as it relates to religion, is that in yoga, it is assumed you are innately good. That you have everything you need within you to thrive, but we've just forgotten what "that" is. In many Western religions, it is assumed that you are innately a sinner, that you must work hard in this life to make up for the bad person that you are. Good luck. This puts incredible pressure on the person to "do the right thing." In Yoga, all we ask is that you be who you are, because you are the right thing already. It's a radical shift in thinking that is often considered freeing and liberating to souls who are feeling particularly bound by other religious or societal dogmas putting them down.

Much of yoga deals with things that cannot be seen with the eye. God cannot be seen with the eye either, but many of us have found away to invite her into our lives. Energy is a large concept in yoga – the management of our energy is essentially the ultimate ability to control our beings. We must begin to notice the subtleties to find the Truth. This is hard for the rational mind to understand. It involves faith, devotion and practice. It's a long-term vs. a short-term solution. And often it's creating more problems than it's solving. We were not taught to manage subtleties growing

up.

Yoga encourages us to do what is right, to be what is right for us, despite the fact that other people may be telling us to do or be something or someone else, despite the fact that this may diverge completely from the common societal path prescribed for us on that card that was handed to us at birth.

You are actually presented two cards at birth: One by God (or who/whatever you believe in) and a card by your parents. Your parents want you to be what they want you to be. God wants you to be what she wants you to be. It's up to you to find that card within you. It's up to you to find God within you. That card is hidden, and your parents do a really good job burying it by introducing you to other options. In our quest to please the 'rents, we walk away from God's hand. It's always there, open, waiting, ready to receive us as the radiant, divine and unique beings that we are. She's never going away until our bodies leave this earth. And still your soul will wander on, looking for her. You can choose at any time to start looking for a new treasure.

7. Yoga is scary because it reveals our Truth and invites us to accept it.

Yoga is the map to God's treasure. We are afraid to be who we are because we are afraid of all the things mentioned above. Of being judged. Of not knowing what we're doing. Of giving up a life we already have oiled and fine-tuned to run smoothly. Of leaving behind the work we've done to get where we are. Of giving it all up for something everyone else thinks is crazy. We're afraid we'll lose the love and support of friends and family.

The Truth means we probably have to start over. We have to become a beginner again. As we get older, this gets harder and harder. We've got more in the game of life to lose. When we are younger this is easier. It also means we have more years in our life to live our Truth. How exciting!

If we have had glimpses of our Truth in the past, then revealing the full truth is even scarier because we've already spent a good deal of time avoiding the inevitable. We've worked even harder to throw more dirt on top of the mess covering up the truth. We're running away at full speed doing everything we can to deny and disprove what we know is really true. We're running from the fear of the Truth.

To accept the Truth means things are going to have to change.

8. Yoga is scary because it prompts us to change, most of the time in a major way.

Once we know the Truth, our lives will be miserable if we do anything in opposition to it. This doesn't mean that we won't still suffer and make choices unaligned with what we know is the right thing.

For those of us who have all our ducks in a row, or feel like we're close, change will be disruptive to the sense of peace we've created. Just know that this sense of peace is temporary and very fragile. If we've feared change all our lives, that means we're holding on to a way of being that is familiar. Familiar means we know the lay of the land, the rules of the place. Change means we

don't know what to expect (see above), we don't know what to do (see above), we don't want to fail or succeed because then we won't know what to do and we don't want to look the fool. What a cycle of fear! This fear holds us back from changing. And so we suffer because without the change, we'll always be living in opposition to our Truth.

Now maybe you are living your Truth already. Congratulations! You're much farther along the path than I. Revel in it but don't get attached.

“Change is the only constant.” -Heraclitus

Your circumstances and situations in life will change always, leaving you to constantly recalibrate your Truth to your life as it appears in front of you. The work is never done.

9. Yoga is scary because it assumes that we are already good and perfect just the way we are, and our minds have a hard time grasping this concept.

Accepting that we are perfect just the way we are in all our imperfection is preposterous for perfectionists.

Accepting that it's good enough is a foreign language for many of us. In yoga, there is a concept called *santosa*, which means contentment. Can we be content with the way things are? This is somewhat paradoxical because you might argue that I've spent the past few pages telling you that it's important to change who you are. Why not just be content? The phrase “the way things are” refers to the Truth. Accepting and being content with the truth is *santosa*. Accepting the way things are as they are presented to you without first discerning if it is in line with your Truth is lazy.

10. Yoga is scary because it asks us to live.

What if every morning you woke up and declared that today you were going to live just a little more than you did the day before. The alternative is to wake up every morning and decide that you are going to die a little bit more than you did yesterday. That you are going to accept the passing of time, the aging process, the rules set forth for you by others. That you are going to blindly participate in this world of dying souls, wither away little by little each and every day.

Which scenario would you prefer?

To live, we must feel.

It's like we must jump from one cycle to the next. We can either live in the cycle of fear or we can live in the cycle of life. It's possible to jump from one to the other. But first we must see the other wheel. When we see the other wheel, we must make the conscious choice to jump. When we jump, we must jump with faith, knowing that the wheel of fear will always be underneath us to catch us if we fall off the wheel of life.

That's comforting and terrifying at the same time. That's life.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Different Styles of Yoga

Now that you have a slightly broadened idea of what yoga is, what it can do for you and why it's really, really scary, let's talk about the different types of physical training you can do to get the body and mind ready for your soul journey (sojourn!).

There are many different styles of yoga that you can practice. They have all been created for different reasons and speak to different people and personalities. Within yoga philosophy itself, there are four different kinds of yoga that all other forms of yoga fall underneath.

The Four Yoga Paths

These four styles are Jnana Yoga, Karma Yoga, Raja Yoga and Bhakti Yoga.

Jnana Yoga is the path of accumulating wisdom and knowledge about yourself and the outside world. This path of yoga favors introspection and contemplation. It can be thought of as the scholarly path of yoga.

Karma Yoga is the path of service. It favors serving others selflessly without worrying about the reward. It's a path that favors right action in the world, as serving others can be accomplished both by volunteering but also by following your passions and working to serve others in your daily life and work.

Raja Yoga deals primarily with the mind, favoring meditative practices and bringing the mind back under your own control.

Bhakti Yoga deals with joy, love, compassion and devotion to the divine within yourself and all others. Bhakti is about expressing your soul, smiling, laughing and having fun.

The way I look at it, you can integrate the four types of yoga in this way:

- Jnana – Education/learning about yourself and the world. The work that needs to be done to help you reconnect to your true Self
- Raja – The meditation that you do and the mindset shifts you make to help you show up in this world in control and with power
- Karma – The passion work you do to serve others and make the world a better place
- Bhakti – Your soul expressing itself with joy and playfulness each and every day through song, dance or whatever makes your heart come alive

Following these different paths of yoga throughout your life will lead you to live the life of your dreams, which, by the way, isn't a dream at all but your God-given reality. Remember the treasure hunt? We say it's a dream because we have glimpses of it. The only way we can have glimpses of it is if we've seen it. We've seen it because it's always been within us. It's just hidden.

We misinterpret that as a dream out *there* somewhere when really it's a reality in *here* some-

where.

Underneath these four master paths, there are hundreds of different styles. In fact I believe each person has their own personal style. Hatha Yoga is the form of yoga we are most familiar with in the West. This style of yoga was developed to deal specifically with the yoga asanas or poses. It is the physical branch of yoga that helps you stretch and strengthen the body.

The Physical Practice Variety

The asanas were actually developed to serve one purpose – prepare the body for long periods of meditation. If you think about it, it's really uncomfortable to sit for hours doing anything without moving. It requires a lot of flexibility and strength, thus the asanas were developed to prepare the body to sit in meditation. Obviously, us Westerners took things from there. But in India, the original purpose of Hatha Yoga was just this.

Here is a brief overview of some of the most popular forms of Hatha Yoga. These are the different styles of yoga you will see on studio class schedules:

- AcroYoga – A subset of Partner Yoga performed with two people. Think of the game “airplane” that you played with your mother or father when you were little. One person lies on the ground and “flies” the second person in the air, balancing them on top of their feet as the person in the air performs poses.
 - What you'll get: A good stretch and some thrills
 - Great for: Adventurers and thrill seekers
- Aerial Yoga – A form of yoga performed on cloth “harnesses” suspended from the ceiling.
 - What you'll get: Strength and a sense of weightlessness
 - Great for: Gymnasts and individuals who have always wanted to fly
- Anusara – A style of yoga focused on proper alignment and backbending to open up the heart.
 - What you'll get: A physical practice with an emphasis on backbending
 - Great for: Individuals searching for a deeper connection to the heart, compassion and love.
- Ashtanga – This is a physical style of yoga that is quite rigid and methodical.
 - What you'll get: A workout and eventually the strength and flexibility to stand on your hands.
 - Great for: Athletes or athletic types and people looking for some cross-training
- Bhakti – A form of yoga promoting love, spirituality and music.
 - What you'll get: A lot of chanting and a decently physical practice
 - Great for: Singers and dancers
- Bikram – A set sequence of postures always performed in the same sequence in a very, very hot room.
 - What you'll get: A physically intense practice that will make you sweat a lot and increase your flexibility and strength
 - Great for: Thrill seekers
- Chair Yoga – An adaptive style of yoga performed sitting in a chair.
 - What you'll get: A good stretch
 - Great for: people who are working with disabilities or are limited in their movement.
- Forrest – A style of yoga focused on core work and healing.
 - What you'll get: A relatively physical practice that can be adapted for all levels, plus a huge emphasis on working the abs
 - Great for: Individuals wanting to slim the waistline and heal from past emotional trauma
- Hatha – A general term referring to the general use of a variety of yoga postures. Hatha Yoga classes are normally slower in pace and a good fit for beginners.
 - What you'll get: A good stretch, potentially some quiet time for meditation or contemplation and some strength
 - Great for: Beginners and individuals who are looking to take it slow
- Hot Yoga – A general term that is often used to describe Bikram yoga but can also be used to describe other styles of yoga practiced in a heated room.
 - What you'll get: Heated yoga classes are typically held in a room heated to a minimum of 85 degrees F and a maximum of 105. Some studios also add humidity.
 - Great for: Heat lovers
- Integral – A form of yoga emphasizing tips on how to live a better life through the completion of yoga poses, chanting, meditation and breathwork.
 - What you'll get: Specific instruction in different breathing exercises, and slow, gentle yoga poses
 - Great for: Those seeking a more spiritual experience
- Iyengar – A style of yoga known for its adamant insistence on proper alignment for safety and holding poses for long periods of time.
 - What you'll get: A really great stretch, some strength and an increase in focus and mental resiliency
 - Great for: People looking to increase self-discipline and focus
- Jivamukti – A style of yoga based on discovering a deeper connection to self.
 - What you'll get – Spiritual instruction as well as intense physical poses
 - Great for – The perpetual learner interested in knowing more about the spiritual philosophy underlying yoga and a very physical practice
- Kripalu - A gentler style of yoga that encourages spiritual reflection, meditation and healing.
 - What you'll get: A lot of meditation and gentle yoga poses suitable for beginners
 - Great for: Individuals less interested in the physical benefits or who are looking to heal a specific injury, sickness or emotional trauma in their life
- Kundalini – A style of yoga that uses kriyas, or specific movements repeated over extended periods of time to help influence the body's natural flow of energy
 - What you'll get: Physically and mentally intense movements that require extreme discipline and focus. A lot of talk about the chakras and energy body.
 - Great for: Energy medicine enthusiasts and people looking for an interesting challenge
- Moksha – Another form of hot yoga with a set series of yoga poses done in a specific sequence.
 - What you'll get: Sweat, strength and flexibility
 - Great for: Warm-blooded individuals and those with a passion for saving the environment, as the style is strict about environmental standards
- Partner Yoga – A form of yoga practiced with two or more people to experience stretches more deeply and experience a deeper connection with others.
 - What you'll get: A great stretch and a deeper connection with your partner

- Great for: Couples, friends and family
- Power Yoga – A physically intense form of yoga emphasizing the integration of strength and flexibility.
 - What you'll get: A physically intense class with core work and potentially some inversions and arm balances.
 - Great for: Body builders, athletes, gym rats and anyone looking to build strength and power in their body
- Restorative – A very gentle form of yoga that encourages stretching through long holds and the use of many props.
 - What you'll get: A great stretch and stress-relief
 - Great for: Individuals looking to relax, stretch and relieve stress
- Sivananda – A type of yoga focusing on five principles that include yoga poses, breathing exercises, meditation, relaxation and eating a specific diet.
 - What you'll get – An entire lifestyle
 - Great for: Individuals interested in a different way of life
- Stand Up Paddle Board Yoga – Yoga poses performed on a paddle board in the water.
 - What you'll get: A yoga practice to challenge and improve your balance
 - Great for: Water lovers
- Viniyoga – An individualized yoga practice based on providing yoga as a type of physical therapy.
 - What you'll get: A practice customized just for you
 - Great for: Individuals suffering from injury or sickness
- Vinyasa – A physical style of yoga that links movement together with the breath.
 - What you'll get: A practice that raises your heart rate and has you moving constantly
 - Great for: Dancers and Type A'ers
- Yin – A gentle style of yoga that concentrates on holding poses for long periods of time to stretch the fascia and muscle tissue rather than the muscle itself.
 - What you'll get: A very relaxing, deep stretch
 - Great for: Athletes looking to recover after a hard workout or training and individuals looking for deep relaxation
- Yoga Nidra – Also known as yogic sleep, a guided meditation performed while lying on your back.
 - What you'll get: The deepest relaxation you've ever felt
 - Great for: PTSD sufferers, individuals suffering from emotional trauma, and individuals looking for deep relaxation and stress relief

CHAPTER FIVE

How to Stay Safe when Practicing Yoga

Yoga, like all popular things, has gotten a bad rap in the media as of late. But if we remember that the media's job is to show you all sides of the coin, especially the bad side because fear sells (hey, this is what they teach us in Journalism school), then of course it's only rational that there will inevitably be a lot of hype about how yoga is incredibly dangerous.

And the media is right. It is.

For a whole lot of reasons.

The number one reason why yoga is so dangerous is because it encourages you to think for your SELF. When you think for your SELF, you challenge the status quo and quickly apply for application to the rebel society. You realize that the precarious ways of the world how others want it to be lived don't necessarily jive with the ways you want to live. And so you boycott. The people who pull the strings at the top, including the media moguls, don't want that. So to them, yoga is VERY dangerous.

Don't be Stupid

Yoga is also a physical exercise. Like all physical exercises, you can get hurt when practicing. But like all exercises, you only get hurt when you're being stupid.

Here is what it looks like to be stupid when practicing yoga.

- You go into a stretch and don't listen to what the teacher tells you to do.
- You proceed to feel uncomfortable and slightly in pain, but you do the pose anyway because everyone else is doing it and you don't want to look weak, dumb or incapable.
- You pull your hamstring, tear a ligament or dislocate a shoulder.

That is stupid.

In fact, most of us are stupid every single day because we do not listen to what our body is telling us. Granted, it's really hard to listen to your body and go against what every one else is telling you. This is a direct war between the body and the ego. When the body wins, you win. When the ego wins, you lose. Always.

We're talking long-term winnings here. When you listen to your body you might think you lose in the short-term, i.e., you can't do a pose that you really want to do and you start to feel embarrassed because everyone else can do it but you.

News flash: Everyone else is not you.

Everyone else has a different story. Everyone else has either been practicing longer than you or they're being stupid too. DO NOT join the stupid club.

If we want to talk who's the best in yoga, which really isn't a real conversation, but for the sake of argument we'll go there anyway, the best yogi is the one who uses props, takes the modifications and rests when he or she has had enough. The best yogi is the one who has skillfully learned to listen and respond to the body. The best yogi is the one who ignores the ego screaming at you constantly – DO THAT INSTEAD. IT LOOKS COOLER. YOU CAN DO IT. JUST A LITTLE FURTHER. YOU DON'T FEEL PAIN.

NO PAIN, NO GAIN, right?

WRONG! Who ever made that up was stupid. Now if that person said "No uncomfortable sensations, no gain" then maybe we could talk.

So yes, in yoga we twist ourselves into pretzels. And sometimes that's really uncomfortable. You know what else is uncomfortable? Ignoring your ego and coming down into child's pose when everyone else is in handstand. Believe me, I want to be in handstand too. But I'd rather listen to my body than get hurt. I like using my shoulders.

What It Takes To Be A Professional Yogini

Yogis are pros at being comfortable with what is uncomfortable. To obtain pro status, you first have to be able to delineate between pain and discomfort. To get there, you have to experience it. This is the real test. When you experience it, what do you do? Do you come out of the pose and rest or take a modification or do you power and muscle your way through, scrunching up your face, grimacing, clenching your jaw and breathing shallow? You will get hurt if you do the latter. Maybe not this time, but some day.

The large majority of yoga injuries are repetitive stress injuries. That means you're doing something wrong over a long period of time and then one day, you finally break. This is why finding a teacher who is adamant about alignment is so important. If you listen to your alignment-based teacher, you will avoid repetitive stress injuries. If you don't...well, good luck.

The best thing you can do as a student is ask questions. If something doesn't feel right, ask. If you feel like you're not getting something, take a private lesson so that you can specifically learn the things you need to learn to ensure that you are able to adequately take care of your body. A teacher can't possibly make sure you're always taking care of your body in a class of five people or more. That's just the reality.

Yoga is meant to help you heal, not to hurt you. It's up to you to decide your fate. I hope you choose to heal.

Also, healing is HARD, thus Yoga is hard. We're not just healing physical injuries here, we're healing years of emotional and mental stress. The body is an integrated and connected ecosystem of energy and matter. If you experience a traumatic emotional experience and don't heal yourself properly, you will experience physical repercussions down the line, guaranteed. The body isn't that mysterious, you just need to crack the secret code.

CHAPTER SIX

Everything You Need to Practice Yoga

Arguably you don't need anything to practice yoga. It's like running. Put on some clothes (or don't) and go outside. Same principles apply here. Put on some clothes (or don't) and go outside. If you hate nature, you don't even have to go outside. Find a small space within the confines of some walls and just start.

Do not let everything you need prevent you from starting. The truth is, you really don't need anything to start. If you think you do and this is preventing you from starting then you are just making excuses and you need to examine why you're afraid to start. Seriously.

If you're worried about looking like a fool, don't be. To assuage your fears, here is a list of the things you might think about having.

The Mental/Emotional Checklist for Starting A Yoga Practice

First and foremost you need to have an **open mind**. There will be things you cannot do, things you've never seen done before and things that will elicit a spontaneous reaction of "HELL NO!" If you keep an open mind, you'll create the space in your mind and body for new possibilities and be more likely to enjoy your practice. You'll progress more quickly and surprise yourself along the way with what you actually can do. Remember "If you say you can't, you won't."

Secondly, and almost just as important, you need **compassion**. Compassion for your Self, just as you are in the moment. Compassion requires trust and truth. You need to trust your Self to let you know what is and is not okay in your body. This will be your guide to keeping your physical body safe in yoga. If you can't be compassionate, you'll be competitive, hard, forceful, and hurt yourself. You won't come back and you'll decide that yoga is stupid.

You're going to need **strength**, but don't think that because you don't have it to start with, you're not able to practice. Showing up to a yoga class, or starting a yoga practice on your own with no prior experience takes a lot of strength. Don't forget that strength doesn't just connote the physical body. Strength of character is more important than your physical body strength and will get you a lot farther in the practice than anything else.

**Special note here:* Do not doubt the physical, mental and emotional practice of yoga. If you practice with devotion, with a good teacher and with compassion, yoga is exhausting. You don't need to be lifting weights to gain strength. But don't expect yoga to give you a chiseled look. It certainly can, but this will depend on your body type more than anything else and not how much yoga you do. Some of us just won't ever have six pack abs. Thank God for the body she gave you and move on. Just because you don't have six pack abs doesn't mean you are not stronger - physically, emotionally and mentally - than most people with them.

You need **flexibility**.

Before I move on here, DO NOT tell me that you can't practice yoga because you aren't flexible. That is the worst excuse ever invented on the face of the planet. Just like strength, flexibility does not just refer to the physical body. The bendy people you see practicing yoga were not that bendy before they started practicing. And they practiced A LOT to get that bendy. If you practice A LOT, you will get that bendy too. Yes, it might take five years. Unless you're a gymnast, dancer or circus performer, you will not walk into a yoga class with stellar flexibility. Especially if you're a big runner, weight lifter or exercise enthusiast.

What you do need is flexibility of mind. This is very similar to keeping an open mind. Be flexible. Try new things. New teachers. New styles of yoga. New times. New spots in the room. New poses. Just try.

Finally you need a teacher. Not a guru. In fact, I suggest you be very wary of the self-proclaimed guru's. Rod Stryker once said that if as teachers we are truly practicing yoga, we should be aiming to put ourselves out of business. You learn lessons from teachers about your body, mind and soul. After awhile, you've amassed the wisdom and are ready to strike out on your own. That doesn't mean you won't go back for a refresher course every now and then, but true teachers want to see you learn and then leave. If you're always learning, you're not putting what you're learning into action. What good is that?

Find a teacher who speaks to your soul. Who you enjoy hearing speak. Who challenges you physically, mentally and emotionally. You don't have to be friends with your teacher. You don't even have to get romantically involved with your teacher. The best teachers are the toughest ones. The best teachers are the ones who teach to teach and not to be popular people-pleasers. The best teachers are students themselves.

The List O' Props

The physical products you can buy to make your practice more comfortable and your experience more enjoyable are convenient but not absolutely necessary.

Here's a list and some suggestions of where you can find the best of the best:

- Yoga mat
- Blocks
- Straps
- Blankets

The best place to go to get all your yoga props cheaply and quickly is YogaDirect.com [AFFILIATE LINK]. This website has a wide selection, the cheapest prices and is recognized across the industry as a quality provider of yoga accessories. The props that studios offer for their students are often ordered from YogaDirect.

**A special note about props.* Most of these things are manufactured for the yoga industry and thus cost a lot of money. If money is an issue (which, let's face it, it's an issue in one way or another for most of us), then use these common and just as useful substitutes.

Blocks

- Water bottle
- Soup can
- Something you can put weight on that is somewhat sturdy like a massive dictionary, encyclopedia or your favorite copy of Harry Potter (the 4th or 7th is probably your best bet as these are the thickest).

Just make sure whatever you choose is stable and won't break, move or hurt you in any way.

Straps

- Belts
- Towels
- Scarves

Just make sure you don't have an unhealthy attachment towards the items you choose, as yes, it's possible that you could, perhaps rip, tear or break it if you pull hard enough.

Blankets

- You don't need a special yoga blanket
- Just find a blanket
- Any blanket
- A comforter

You want something a little bulky, as most of the time blankets are used to help prop you up.

That's really all you need. There are a lot of other things you might consider investing in after awhile, but now we're in the luxury item category.

A List of Yogini Luxury

- [Toe Sox](#)
- [Toe separators](#)
- [Towels & hand towels](#)
- Yoga bag
- [Yoga clothes](#) (padded bras, yoga pants, compression shorts, etc.)
- Reusable water bottle
- [Malas](#)
- Guided meditations
- [Meditation cushions](#)
- [Tea](#)

*The links above are for some of my personal favorite brands of yoga products. By clicking on some of the above links and making a purchase, you are helping to pay me for the work I do. Please know, that I only promote products that I can personally vouch for. I would only ever direct you to the very best products and I hope that you find the above list and this chapter as a whole useful and informative.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Basic Yoga Poses

There are a few basic yoga poses that are universal to most practices. If you know these yoga poses, you'll have a good foundation for understanding yoga no matter where you go.

The poses are as follows:

Childs Pose

Child's pose is probably the most common pose to start a class in and it's also a universally recognized resting posture. Start by bringing your knees wide to the edges of your mat and bring your big toes to touch behind you. Place your forehead on the mat and reach your arms out in front of you. Keep pushing your butt down toward your heels to the best of your ability. It's really great to bring awareness to the breath in child's pose because you're able to feel your belly expand on your inhale and contract on the exhale.

This is metaphorically your Self giving you permission to return to childhood.

Accept the challenge and invite in a sense of play. Let go of your need to judge. Most children don't even know how to until they're taught or the judgment is modeled by authority figures.



Mountain Pose

Start by standing with your feet close together or to touch. Press down through your feet to feel a connection to the ground beneath you. Reach your hands up overhead so that your biceps move toward your ears. Relax your shoulder blades down away from your back, spread your fingers wide and turn your palms inward to face each other.

Feel a sense of inner power, strength and stability in this pose. Channel your inner mountain.



Forward Fold

From Mountain pose, hinge forward from the hips with a flat back sweeping your arms out to the side and then down toward the ground as if drawing a semi circle with each arm. The hands will ideally touch the ground, but this will totally depend on your flexibility. If that's not happening, use blocks underneath your hands or interlace the hands at the opposite crooks in your elbow. Most importantly relax your head and neck. Knees can always be bent if your hamstrings are extra tight.

Surrender to gravity in this pose.



Plank Pose

Just like the popular planking trend, think high push-up position here. Ideally, your heels, hips and shoulders form one strong and straight line. Line up your shoulders right over your wrists, pull your chest and gaze forward, pull your belly button up and in to activate the core and press back through the soles of your feet and the ankles to fire up the legs.

Connect with your core in Plank. Feel how connecting to your center breeds fire – warmth and energy.



Chatarunga (low plank)

This pose wins the Senior Award for Most Likely to Be Done Wrong and Lead to Injury. Starting in high plank (or high push-up position), start to lower down halfway by pulling your elbows in toward your rib cage. You are looking to stop when your elbows form a 90-degree angle between the bicep and the forearm. **DO NOT GO DOWN ANY FURTHER.** If you're not sure, it's always good to practice in front of a mirror or stop before you get to that 90 degrees.

Keep pressing back through the feet while lowering down so that your whole body is involved in the pose. The core is very important for holding the body up as you lower down; if you don't have the strength in the core to hold your body weight up, you'll want to lower your knees down to the ground until you can build up your strength. Do not feel ashamed if you can't do it the first time. Do not let your ego get the best of you. You will get hurt if you continuously do this pose over and over again the wrong way. Being afraid that you're going to be labeled or judged as weak is never going to happen in your yoga class. Hurting your shoulder will happen.

Don't forget to breathe. You're developing a keen sense of awareness and control in this pose.



Upward Facing Dog

From Chatarunga (or low plank) flip your toes over so that the tops of your feet and toes are facing down on the mat. Press down into the tops of your feet to keep your knees lifted off the ground and pull your chest up and back. You'll need to keep your core engaged here to protect your low back even though you're stretching across the front of the body. Pull your shoulder blades together across your back to get an extra stretch across the chest. Gaze straight in front of you. If this hurts your low back, don't do it.

Let go of your need to protect and feel how good it is to open up the area of the body where your heart resides.



Cobra

If Upward Facing Dog is not your thing, try Cobra. Where Upward Facing Dog is all about stretching through the front line of the body, Cobra is all about strengthening your back muscles so that you can someday progress to Upward Facing Dog without pain.

In Cobra, you'll lie down on your belly. Bring your feet together to touch behind you and your palms face down directly underneath the shoulders with elbows bent up toward the sky. Keep your gaze down. If you imagine your neck as the natural extension of your spine that it is, you'll realize that you want to keep your gaze down and not up, otherwise you're disrupting the lengthening and strengthening of the spine.

Press down lightly through your hands and really press down through your feet while lifting your torso up off the mat. To accomplish this, you're ideally using your low back to lift you up. To make sure you're not cheating by relying on arm strength, pick your palms up off the mat. If you want to move this strengthening exercise into more of a stretch, you can slowly add more and more pressure into the arms to lift your chest up. The higher you lift the chest, the more you'll want to pull your elbows in and tighten your core. If this ever hurts your low back, **DON'T DO IT.**

Imagine you're a snake slowly lifting up to see what's going on. Move with grace and power.



Downward Facing Dog

From Upward Facing Dog or Cobra, flip your toes over again, activate your core muscles and press your hips up into the air and back behind you. Press your palms down into the ground with your fingers spread wide and your index finger pointing straight ahead. By pressing down into the knuckles of the forefinger and thumb, you'll more evenly distribute the weight in the hands and wrists as opposed to allowing the weight to fall to the outside of the wrists.

Gaze up at your belly button to keep the neck long. Tilt your tailbone gently up toward the ceiling and see if you can feel the spine lengthen. Finally, press down through your heels as if you were working to get them to touch the mat. They don't need to touch the mat by any means, but the conscious act of pressing them down will really help you feel the stretch in the back of the legs.

Downward Facing Dog is considered a resting posture; as such, see if you can find a balance between exerting effort and relaxing into the pose.



Warrior 1

From Downward Facing Dog, bring your right leg forward and place your foot in between your hands as if you were moving into a low lunge. Use your arms to get your foot all the way in between your hands so that your knee stacks right over your ankle. This will set you up for better, safer alignment and protect you from injury. Your left foot will spiral down so that the outside of the foot presses down into the mat and the toes point out between 45 and 75 degrees. Your back leg will stay straight throughout the entire pose.

With your front knee bent, raise your arms over head just like in mountain pose. The challenge in this pose is to keep the hips moving toward the front of the room. To do this, you'll most likely need to encourage your left hip forward and pull your right hip backward. Keep working to straighten the back leg and keep working to maintain the lunge in the front leg.

After taking a few breaths in this pose, switch sides, bringing the left foot forward.

Warrior 1 is all about arriving as the warrior. Practice this pose with a sense of confidence and knowing. You are arriving as a warrior after all. Prepare for battle.



Warrior 2

From Warrior 1, you'll open up your hips toward the side of the room. The feet and legs will stay mostly the same, but you might look down at your feet and make sure that the heel of the right foot bisects the arch of the left foot. This might involve some scooting of the right or left foot to one side or the other. The left foot may also move into a 90-degree angle to help the hips open.

While maintaining the lunge in the right leg, stack your shoulders right over your hips and extend your arms out to the front and back of the room as if your arms were natural extensions of your shoulders (they are, by the way). Spread your fingers wide and lower your shoulder blades away from your ears. Gaze over your right middle finger.

Now that you have arrived, you are focusing on your first move. Feel a sense of inner confidence, fire and passion build slowly in your belly. Concentrate on your breathing and gather your senses before taking action. Reconnect to your internal power before externally manifesting your energy.

After taking a few breaths in this pose, switch sides, bringing the left foot forward.

(Warrior 3 completes the series, but is a much more advanced pose, so we won't go there in this book.)



Chair Pose

From Forward Fold, bend your knees and start to lift your arms over head. Imagine you are sitting down into an imaginary chair behind you. Make sure that you can see your toes over your knees and pick up your toes to automatically bring your weight into your heels. This will allow you to sit down even further. Maintain the natural arch in your low spine by tucking the tailbone down slightly. Keep lifting your chest up. As always, lower your shoulder blades away from your ears.

This pose may create a burning sensation in the thighs. See if you can come to love the burn.



Tree Pose

A great beginner's balancing pose, Tree Pose helps calm you down. Starting in Mountain Pose, with your hands on your hips or your palms pressing together at heart center, press down through your right foot and pick up your left foot. The sole of your left foot will come to your ankle, to the inside of your calf or to the inside of your thigh. Avoid letting the foot rest on the knee joint as this can damage the knee. Use your hand to get your foot where you need it.

From here, press your foot into the leg and press the leg back into the foot. This is the secret of Tree Pose, as it really helps stabilize your foundation by strengthening the legs. You can keep your hands on your hips or at heart center or you can reach them up over head. If you're really up for a challenge, close your eyes.

Visualize yourself as an actual tree, with roots that spread far and wide into the ground and branches extending up and out to the sky and leaves swaying peacefully in the wind.



Baddha Konasana (Bound Angle)

Sit up tall with a straight spine and your knees falling out to either side. Bring the soles of your feet together to touch. Play with how close you can bring your feet toward your body and how changing the position of the feet changes the stretch you feel in your hips. Stay seated this way for a few breaths or start to hinge forward with a flat back and fold over the legs. This will increase the stretch in the hips.

Hip opening postures are great for people who have tight hips from frequent sitting or a lot of running and athletic pursuits. But hip stretches are also fabulous for those of us who store old emotions in the fascia. You won't know if this is you until you start crying for no reason in a hip opening pose. It happens. Let it be.



Bridge Pose

Lie on your back with your knees bent and the soles of your feet on the ground. Have your feet about hip distance apart and point your toes in slightly to encourage your knees and hips to move toward each other. Start to press your shins forward and then lift your hips up off the ground. One vertebra at a time, roll the torso up to the ceiling so that the chest moves back toward the chin and the chin keeps moving away from the chest. DO NOT look side to side in this pose, as it can hurt your neck.

If you want a little more stretch in the chest, interlace your fingers underneath you and scoop the shoulders under your chest to find a little more lift. Keep pressing the shins forward, release any tightening in the glutes and isometrically squeeze the inner thighs together.

Bridge is all about lengthening the spine. Imagine you are creating a physical bridge between your body and your mind.



Seated Forward Fold

Sit tall with your legs extended out in front of you. Flex your toes back toward your face and bend your knees if you have extra tight hamstrings. On an inhale feel your chest lifting up and on your exhale hinge from the waist with a flat back and grab hold of something with your hands. What you can reach will depend on hip and hamstring flexibility. It might be the thighs, the calves, the sides of the feet, the toes. Keep replicating the lengthening action of the spine on the inhale and the hinging action of the hips on the exhale. Stay here for a few breaths and then round the spine and fold forward completely. Release your head and neck and hang here for a few more breaths.

Seated Forward Folds are really symbolic of our journey in life. Always reaching for some new milestone, for something a little farther ahead. The challenge is to be content with exactly where you're at and to appreciate the journey along the way. Detach from the ends and become curious with the means.



Supine Twist

Lying on your back, pull your right knee in toward your armpit. Give it a nice squeeze. Your left leg will be lying flat on the ground extending long in front of you. With your left hand, grab the outside of the right knee and start pulling the leg across the body down toward the ground. You don't have to have the knee touch the ground. Spread your arms out to either side like your body is forming the letter t and then gaze over your right fingers. Rather than trying to force your right knee and leg down to the ground, let it hang and see what it feels like to let gravity do the work.

After a couple breaths on this side, release the right leg to the ground and switch sides, pulling the left knee into the armpit and across the body.

When twisting, you may naturally feel slightly uncomfortable. Keep taking deep breaths and know that twisting things up and confusing the body and mind can be a good practice in avoiding habit-forming patterns.



Savasana (Corpse)

This is often most people's favorite pose in yoga but it's also truly the hardest. Once we relax the physical body, there is nothing for us to focus on but the monkey mind. And for most of us, the mind drives us crazy.

To get into Savasana, lie down on your back with your legs and arms spread wide. Close your eyes. Let your palms face up. Rather than trying to control your breath, see if you can just follow your inhales and exhales as they naturally occur.

Corpse is called so for a reason. It's symbolic of dying at the end of your practice, just like each moment is born and then dies within a matter of seconds. When you get up from your corpse pose, you are reborn. This is true on a cellular level, as you've just engaged in physical activity that has helped breathe new oxygen into your body and pump new blood into your organs and throughout your veins.

At the same time, people are often very afraid of death. To come up against the idea of really letting go of all control is an incredibly scary thought. The best thing we can do to overcome that fear is breathe through it.



To access free video demonstrations of these poses, sign up for my weekly newsletter. I'll email you a link to a special bonus page where you'll be able to view yoga videos exclusively for email subscribers. I'll take you through the poses, show you how they're done and lead you through the sequences as they're typically taught in Vinyasa yoga classes.

[Sign up here](#)



CHAPTER EIGHT

The Rules of the Yoga Studio

Yoga studios are very different than your typical gym. They foster a community unlike the gym. There is less competition, more friendliness. You're often in closer proximity to the people at your yoga studio due to the fact that your typical studio is much smaller than a large gym. Your mats are closer. You see the same people every day. Since most studios are only open when classes are held, there isn't the opportunity to pass through whenever you please. This develops an unspoken accountability measure that unconsciously encourages people to come to the yoga studio more and more often.

But there are some rules and I just want you to know some of them so that you're aware.

Everyone is beautiful the minute they walk into the studio, whether they know it or not.

The right yoga pants will flatter the body and when you're pouring sweat holding a side plank, your muscles are at their best. With that said, do not come to yoga to ogle at the people. Granted the yoga studio is a great place to pick up a date based on the high concentration of beautiful, kind-looking people.

Be kind and courteous.

Strike up a conversation with the stranger next to you. They're no longer a stranger. They're your friend from the 8am class at the yoga studio. And who knows, they may become your friend for a lot of other different reasons.

Be open.

Have an open mind and try new things. Introduce yourself to new people.

Approach your environment with a beginner's mind – always.

Even once you become an advanced practitioner, you'll only remain advanced if you continue to begin. Every day is a new day and an opportunity to learn something new.

To talk or not to talk?

Talking is a controversial topic in yoga studios. Yoga is like golf – that weird activity that is both very much an individual game and also a team sport. The community is your team and though they may or may not help you advance in your practice (chances are they will help you in one way or another) it is important that they are a part of your life. Believe it or not, I went through four years of college at a University with over 40,000 students and didn't feel like I really belonged until I became immersed in my yoga community after I graduated. They will help you through the roughest days and they may not even have to say anything to you. They become part of the walls of the studio and the studio becomes your safe haven. The people are the automatic bonuses that come along with the studio, so treat them well.

If the studio allows talking in the practice room, talk. If you don't want to talk, take child's pose or perform some poses and turn your gaze internally. These are easy ways to nonverbally tell everyone around you don't want to talk right now.

If the studio does not allow talking in the practice room, then don't talk in the practice room. Respect the studio! Make sure you take up your conversations outside.

Keep your area clean.

Clean up after yourself, throw your trash in the garbage can, etc. This sounds like a dumb rule to repeat to adults, but you'd be surprised how many people have no regard for the space around them. Probably because they have little regard for themselves. The studio is your kingdom. Treat it that way.

Pay on time.

Yoga is expensive. Some people argue this is in direct opposition with the whole spirituality of yoga. I disagree. A yoga studio is no cheap business establishment, especially if the studio offers heated classrooms, luxury amenities etc. You're paying for the oasis in your life that you can't create at home. You're paying to escape. You're paying for your health and wellbeing. Sometimes, that costs a lot. Not just in money, but also in effort. The most respectful thing you can do is honor the cost of yoga rather than complain about it. If it's that important to you and you feel like you should make yoga a priority in your life, do it. Stop complaining about the price, accept that you are being given a gift worth more than \$100 a month (especially if you're practicing every single day) and give thanks to your yoga teachers. We are human beings too and have to eat and pay rent and do all those other humanly duties as well. Most of us work really hard to show up and teach a yoga class.

Respect your teachers.

You don't have to like every yoga teacher you've ever come in contact with. You can dislike certain styles of yoga just like you can dislike certain styles of teaching. Just because you dislike a teacher's style, doesn't mean you have to dislike the person. It also doesn't mean you have to be rude to them. Your teachers are human and will make mistakes. Have some compassion for the human condition. We are not gods, no matter how much you find this to be untrue in your experience of us. Some of us might act like we are, depending on our personalities and the level at which we are in our own practice and soul journey. But someday we'll learn we are not. It would do us a lot of good if you don't expect us to be. We're just teachers wanting to share the joys of yoga practice. Something rang true to us about the practice to make us go through a teacher training program and show up and teach. We just want you to find some piece of magic within yourselves as well.

Support the studio.

When the studio needs help, help them out. Show up to events, hang out with the people, get to know the owners, buy the T-shirt. A yoga studio is a small business and also a community spiritu-

al center. It's a safe haven. It's an educational institute. It serves as a lot of different things to a lot of different people. Support it with your heart and soul and the studio will support your journey.

A Note on Gym Yoga

I will not go so far as to say that one form of yoga is better than the other, because I don't believe this is true. I think that offering yoga in gyms is wonderful, but I will say this about "gym yoga." Yoga offered in gyms is most often taught by teachers who have obtained a certification to teach yoga through a group fitness instruction program. These programs are very different and have very different standards for how to teach yoga than the teacher training programs taught in studios. The teacher training programs taught in studios typically deal much more with the philosophy behind yoga than the group fitness programs. The group fitness programs, on the other hand, require the instructor have a much better understanding of anatomy, physiology and other important aspects of body composition and how the body works.

With that said, the flavor of yoga you will find in gyms vs. studios is very different. For one thing most of the teachers (but not all) are coming from different teaching backgrounds. In addition, the yoga studio and the gym have much different energies. Gyms are very competitive places, and this energy spills over into the yoga/group fitness room. On the other hand, a yoga studio is most of the time a very peaceful place that provides a space much more able to assist you in deepening your connection to body, mind and soul. If you don't want to connect to your soul and you just want to stretch, the gym is perfectly fine for you. If you're looking for something a little more interesting and a little deeper, you'll find it at the yoga studio and maybe not so much at the gym.

CHAPTER NINE

Beyond the Yoga Poses: Intro To Mind Training

After you've successfully mastered body coordination and control, all you can really say is that you can listen to your body. Which is a huge win and puts you in the 99th percentile of the United States citizenry. Unfortunately, the rest of the soul hacking journey is only available for the top 1% of the 99th percentile of body controllers. This is because it involves harnessing the power of the mind.

As we'll discover in Chapter 10, yoga is much more than the physical poses. In fact, the physical poses are one component of an overall eight-part plan to help you access your soul joy. The mind is directly involved in every single one of the eight parts.

Mind training is so essential in life that you wonder why it's not routinely included in kindergarten curriculum. Learning how to control your mind so that your mind does not control you may be the most important and useful thing you could ever learn. The good news is it's not too late!

How to Train Your Mind

To train your mind, you must be aware of the concept of meta-attention. In effect, meta-attention is your ability to be aware of what you're aware of. For example, if you are thinking about eating an apple, engaging meta-attention would produce a thought in your head about how you're thinking about eating an apple.

Accessing meta-attention is like hacking into your mind. All the sudden, you have access to the master grid. When you're aware of what you're aware of, you have control. That means you can choose to be aware of what you want to be aware of and choose not to be aware of what you don't want to be aware of.

It's really confusing at first and it kind of makes your head hurt, but once you get into this stuff, it's really cool.

You can't make intelligent decisions about your life if you don't have the proper information. Just the same, you can't tell your mind what to do if you don't know what your mind is doing in the first place. Becoming aware of what your mind is doing gives you the power of choice.

So how do you train the mind? You got it. Meditation.

The Benefits of Meditation

If meditation is scary or boring to you, think of it as a training for specific outcomes. You can train the brain to focus. You can train the brain to concentrate. Focus and concentration are really nifty tools in almost all aspects of your life, including work, which leads to money. Ergo, if you can work more efficiently due to increased focus and concentration, you may be able to argue that you can make more money because you can get more stuff done. Or you can just do your work in less time and get paid the same amount of money and have more time to do the things

you really like doing.

Mounting scientific evidence is also showing that regular meditation practices actually strengthen certain areas of the brain that control our reactivity. This means we are able to bring our emotions in check, leading to an overall more pleasant experience in our daily lives with less drama. This leads to an ability to cope with our emotions better, which means less mental and emotional problems.

At its most basic level, meditation just helps calm you down.

The benefits of meditation are many, but it's one of those things that is really hard to do on your own. Kind of like yoga. You'd rather go to a class or sign up for a workshop than do it by yourself on your own. Unfortunately, there aren't a whole lot of regular meditation classes offered.

Also, meditation is one of those things where you feel like you're not really doing anything so it's hard to quantify the results. Would you really go to a class where you aren't going to do anything? This is probably why there aren't a whole lot of meditation classes offered.

Guided meditations are really great to use as a way to help you fall asleep at night or to get into a meditation practice. That way, you don't really have to do anything except listen to what someone else tells you to do. And you don't even have to go anywhere!

On the subscriber bonus page for this book, I offer a few short guided meditation practices. [Sign up for my newsletter](#) if you haven't gotten access to the subscriber-only book bonus page!

Meditation = Contemplation

Meditation itself means to think about or reflect. We all think about stuff all the time. Can you set aside time each day to reflect? Maybe you already do this when you journal or drink your coffee. See if you can eliminate distractions and just think about your day. Reflecting on your day is a meditation by definition.

Meditation doesn't have to be all spiritual, although it certainly can be and is a great spiritual tool to help you feel connected. It can also be a great way for you to train your brain and focus your thoughts so you can solve complex problems and feel more calm.

You've probably experienced the effects of complex problems on your brain. Often you can't think of a solution and you have to "sleep on it" or go do something completely different before you can think clearly. This is because the brain needs time to process and think, even if it's working on a subconscious level. For that subconscious processing to turn on, you have to turn off the other levers of your brain machine. This is why the best answers come to you when you're taking a shower, going for a walk or doing something completely different. You're shutting down the other levers so that the back-end processing can do its thing. Then, in a calm state, it shoots your answer to you seemingly out of nowhere.

The answers don't come when you're frazzled, stressed and busy. You can use meditation to help turn on those back levers and calm yourself down. The more time you take intentionally throughout your day to turn on the back levers, the more solutions you'll solve and the better you'll feel.

In fact it will seem like your whole life seems to go a lot smoother.

DIY Meditation

If the easiest type of meditation is guided, the hardest is to sit down with nothing – just you and your mind – and focus on your breathing. This type of meditation asks you to hold a one-pointed focus for as long as you can (in meditation traditions this extends into the hours, but for our purposes, I propose setting a timer for one minute to start and increasing from there).

As a zealous beginner you might think that focusing on your breath for one minute is very easy. It's not. If you can focus on nothing but your breath and allow not a single extraneous thought to cross your mind within that time frame, having never meditated before, I applaud you. Increase the timer to five minutes. The truth is you probably can't, because you haven't been training your mind.

Now you have something to work toward. Once you hit the minute mark, keep increasing your time. The mind's natural state is to flit from one thing to the next at the speed of a hummingbird's wings. It's constantly making associations so that you can get a lay of the land and understand how you feel about things.

It's commonly misunderstood that the purpose of meditation is to "quiet the mind". The mind will never really turn off, we will just turn our attention off to the mind itself. This means that the thoughts will be going on in the background, but we won't be paying attention to them. This is hard because thoughts are like bright shiny objects. "Look! That's cool! I forgot about that! Wait, how do you really feel about this? Oooo, I got so mad when that happened today. I wonder where he is these days?" You get the gist.

If you can turn your attention away from your thoughts and co-exist harmoniously with them without getting attached, then you've mastered meditation. Also, you probably will think you've mastered it and something will happen that will throw you back down the hill again. The only thing you can do is start pushing the boulder up to the top, knowing that you've been there before and you can get there again.

In this vein, meditation is like reconciling warring nations or being friends with an ex. Can you really co-exist in harmony? It's certainly possible, but it will take some getting used to, some discomfort and a whole lot of work.

Good luck.

CHAPTER TEN

Basic Yoga Philosophy

Nothing is really relevant these days if it can't be gamified. It worked for Steve Kamb of Nerd Fitness, so I'm going to make yoga philosophy the spiritual equivalent. Let's call it *Call of Duty: Return to the Soul*. How appropriate.

I like to think of yoga philosophy as a quest for hidden treasure. The philosophy provides a pretty good treasure map or gameboard of life (think Chutes & Ladders or Candy Land) for us to explore, and while there is a way to "win," this game is more about the adventure along the way and exploring the whole map rather than getting anywhere in particular. Annoying, I know.

To start, we must realize that there are eight levels of our game to master. You might find the first two levels eerily similar to other codes of conduct outlined in religions such as Christianity. Remember though, yoga is not a religion. If you do not follow these suggestions, I'm not going to tell you you're a sinner. You might just have a harder time finding what you need. This is the roadmap, take it or leave it. The journey is probably a little easier with the map.

One more thing before we get to the first level. Levels most often are progressed in a sequential order. While the order presented here is the intuitive level for the purpose of our understanding, your journey may not happen linearly and there may be many times when the "bad guys" (we'll get to them later) knock you down a level (or five).

Complete the first two levels with each of their respective players individually and you win. Move on to Level 3.

Because the first two levels are so challenging and subsequently boring, most of us cheat and start at Level 3.

Level 1: YAMAS

Choose your player:

Ahimsa (non-violence) – Think Ghandi, Martin Luther King Jr. etc. Play for peace. Yes, that makes things a lot harder. It's easy to resort to violence and much harder to accept everyone and everything with love.

Satya (Truth) – Satya can be very scary and sure, sometimes it hurts. But it's worth it to play your Truth cards. If you can do this successfully, you'll win every time. Watch out for ignorance and selfishness. They'll try to cast a spell of disillusionment on you.

Asteya (non-stealing) – Pretty straight forward, although sometimes you don't even know you're stealing. It takes a very present person to know what he or she rightfully owns and what rightfully belongs to someone (or everyone) else. The ego is your biggest demon here.

Brahmacharya (energy manager) – Sometimes mistaken for abstinence, brahmacharya is all

about knowing when to strike and when to back down. Unfortunately, the mind has other plans than the body and so the main goal here is to reconnect with an understanding of your body to overcome the Great Rule of your Mind.

Aparigraha (non-attachment) – Mismanaged, Aparigraha will confuse everything for his own and refuse to let go.

Level 2: NIYAMAS

Choose your player:

Saucha (cleanliness) – Incidentally, proper hygiene and self-care is incredibly harder than it should be in this time-deprived world. It will take extreme discipline to overcome the evil brothers Sloth & Laziness.

Santosha (contentment) – I know, this level is painfully awful. Who would ever want to be content no matter what is thrown your way? After completing this level you'll be given a key to unlock the secret of happiness.

Tapas (heat) – This little guy is actually kind of fun, but he also kind of sucks. We must maintain a deep sense of discipline to continue down this path. Hint: When you get knocked down, get right back up and keep playing.

Svadyaya (self-study) – What else is there to know, you may ask? You'll be sorry you asked in the first place. After meeting Svadyaya, you'll become infinitely more interested in everyone else but you. Humans are masters at running away from themselves.

Isvara Pranidhana (surrender) – What kind of game is this? A player who's superpower is surrender!? When you learn how to pick your battles and surrender to the game maker's ultimate plan, you'll finally beat Level 2.

Watch out for the bad guys:

- King Ego
- Mr. Mind
- Brothers: Sloth & Laziness
- Wizards: Selfishness & Ignorance
- Princess Fear

Level 3: ASANA

It's a common misconception that to beat this level you must successfully twist yourself into a pretzel. The goal is actually much simpler, but also more subtle, and for this reason most people continue on trying to force their bodies into pretzel-like shapes with little success and even far less progress toward Level 4.

Hint: All you have to do is try, move intentionally and notice how your body feels.

Your biggest enemy? King Ego.

Level 4: PRANAYAMA

A whole level just on breathing! How easy. Except that most beginners complain this is the hardest level yet. Breathing without thinking about it is one thing...learning how to control the breath is quite another. Don't worry, you won't die. Unless of course you stop breathing.

Level 5: PRATYAHARA

This may be the most esoteric level of them all. Pratyahara is all about moving your external sense inward. If you've ever found yourself lost in thought, completely unaware of the sounds and activity around you, you've somewhat experienced pratyahara. Now see if you can find yourself lost in body.

Level 6: DHARANA

It's time for Concentration! This is much harder than the card game. In *Call of Duty: Return to the Soul*, Concentration is all about focusing on one thing for as long as you can without allowing Mr. Mind to direct your attention elsewhere. Good luck.

Level 7: DHYANA

Now that you've mastered King Ego, have control of Body & Mind, and beat Concentration, you're ready to meet your meditation.

Level 9: SAMADHI

The sad thing about Samadhi is after working so hard to get to the end, you rejoice in its feeling for about three seconds and then get thrown back into reality. Samadhi never really lasts. But once you get a taste, you'll be that much more motivated to stay the path, continue your journey and do the work so you can someday experience Samadhi again.

Samadhi is the (sometimes confusing) realization that you are one with the world on a truly cellular level. You have no fear, no judgment, no sense of self. This is freedom.

Playing this game is enough to have you busy for the rest of your life. There are many finer details to take into consideration along the way, but we'll leave that for another game console.

EPILOGUE

There you have it, the map of the soul journey. Remember this is just the beginning. Once you've gotten comfortable with the preparations for the trip, I'll acquaint you more with the places we will go to find the soul.

There's a lot of talk about living your yoga off the mat these days. It's worthwhile to understand how the concepts of a yoga class can be applied in your daily life and I hope that some of my musings here have given you some ideas about how to integrate the gems from your physical practice into your daily routine.

But when you really think about it, this is our daily journey regardless of whether or not we're intentionally applying the principles of yoga, zen or whatever system we subscribe to. When you bring intention to your daily life journey, then the adventure gets fun. On the other hand, when you're going through the motions, just trying to reach something beyond the horizon that you can't make out, well, then you introduce a whole lot of suffering into your life.

Yoga helps you heal. Yoga helps you find enjoyment in your daily journey. This is an unconventional guide because unfortunately, we have to be unconventional these days to get through the clutter of information available. We only buy the new and improved. What I've already told you, but hope you'll conveniently forget, is this is the oldest trick in the book. And yet while it should be conventional by sheer means of time, the cycle of life is such that this system is back to being unconventional because those in power got scared.

Those in power are scared that this system is too powerful. Too empowering. Too disruptive. Too individualistic. Too innovative. And so, these fears have been repurposed as too weird, too woo-woo, too crazy, too esoteric, too impractical.

I say, that's for you to decide.

My hope is that some day, this process, this system becomes the conventional. I need your help to get there.

About the Author

Ashley Josephine Herzberger helps young women all over the world reconnect to their Soul Work. She combines the tools and philosophy of yoga tradition, energy medicine and modern career coaching to help her clients and students build confidence in their daily lives and career. Her innovative [online yoga studio](#) brings together women from all walks of life to practice, discuss and share their soul journey. It is her vision that every young woman in this world makes life and career decisions in alignment with her unique Soul Work.

