

THE PATH OF YOGA



INTERNATIONAL YOGA DAY 2026



*The mat prepares us.
Life is the practice.*

Shaun Simmons

Lokah Samastah Sukhino Bhavantu

May all beings be happy.
May all beings be peaceful.
May all beings be free.

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THE PATH OF YOGA

Sadgurunath Maharaj ki Jay!

Namaste everyone.

Happy International Yoga Day.

It is a joy and an honor to be here at Shanti Mandir, surrounded by this community and in a place dedicated to peace, practice, and the discovery of our deepest nature.

Today I have been asked to speak about The Path of Yoga.

When I first heard that title, I smiled.

Because if you had asked me many years ago what yoga was, I probably would have spoken about postures, flexibility, breathing techniques, or meditation.

But life has a way of deepening our understanding.

Over the years, yoga has taken me across oceans and continents.

It has taken me into ashrams and sacred places.

It has taken me into moments of great joy and moments of great challenge.

And through it all, my understanding of yoga has gradually changed.

Today, when I hear the words The Path of Yoga, I no longer think of something that begins on a mat.

I think of a journey.

A journey of remembering.

A journey of inquiry.

A journey of returning to something that has always been present.

But perhaps another way of saying it is this:

Yoga is the path that gently guides us home.

And here I'd like to begin with a story.



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THE JOURNEY

I was born in Western Australia, on Noongar country, a land of vast horizons, ancient stories, and deep connection to the earth.

At that time, I had no idea where life would take me.

Like many of us, I simply followed the next step that appeared before me.
Over the years, those steps carried me far from the place where I began.

They carried us across oceans and continents.

To India, where we encountered ancient traditions and teachings that had been passed down through countless generations.

To Hawai'i, where the spirit of the land and ocean offered its own wisdom.

To sacred places, teachers, communities, and friendships that helped shape our understanding of life.

And eventually, those same steps led us here, to Shanti Mandir.

Looking back now, I can see that every outer journey was reflecting an inner journey taking place at the same time.

At first, I thought yoga was something we practiced.
Something we did for an hour on a mat.

A discipline.
A technique.
A way of improving myself.

But slowly my understanding began to change.

The more I traveled, the more I realized that yoga was not simply a practice I was doing.

It was becoming a way of seeing.

A way of being.

A way of meeting life.

The journey was teaching me something.

But I didn't yet have the words for it.

So perhaps before we continue, we should pause and ask a simple question:
What is yoga?



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WHAT IS YOGA?

When we hear the word yoga, many different images arise.

Some think of postures.

Some think of flexibility.

Some think of breathing exercises or meditation.

And all of these are beautiful aspects of yoga.

The Sanskrit word yoga comes from the root yuj.

It means to yoke.

To join.

To unite.

Yoga is often translated as union.

The union of body and mind.

The union of breath and awareness.

The union of the individual self with the universal Self.

But over the years, I have come to feel that yoga is also something wonderfully simple.

Yoga is remembering.

Remembering the peace that is already here.

Remembering the awareness that is already present.

Remembering the wholeness that has never actually been lost.

The practices of yoga do not create our true nature.

They reveal it.

They remove the obstacles that prevent us from recognizing what has always been here.

The sage Patanjali described yoga in a simple and profound way:

Yogas chitta vritti nirodha

"Yoga is the stilling of the fluctuations of the mind."

When the surface of a lake becomes still, it clearly reflects the sky.

In the same way, when the mind becomes quiet, we begin to see more clearly.

Not through belief.

Not through philosophy.

Through direct experience.

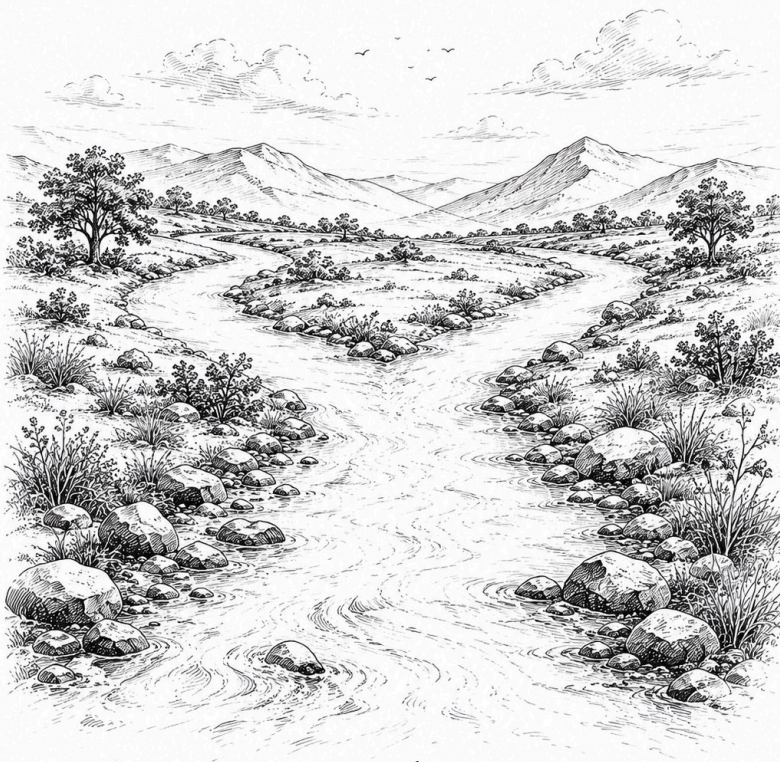
Yoga is not asking us to become something else.

It is inviting us to discover what is already here.

To remember what we truly are.

And sometimes that remembering arrives in the most unexpected ways.

For me, one of those moments arrived while standing in North Carolina with an inflatable globe in my hands.



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THE ANTIPODE STORY

Several years ago, Tanya and I were in Wilmington, North Carolina.

We were preparing for a trip back to my hometown in Western Australia, and Tanya happened to be holding one of those inflatable globes.

We started looking at where we were on the planet and where I had been born.

As we traced our fingers across the globe, we suddenly realized something remarkable.

Wilmington was almost exactly on the opposite side of the Earth from my hometown.

The antipode.

The furthest place you can possibly travel from where you were born.

I remember looking at that globe and thinking:

"Wait a minute..."

I've traveled to the opposite side of the planet.

I've gone as far away from my birthplace as a human being can go.

And then a very strange thought arose:

"I'm still here."

But then I wondered:

Who is this "I" that is still here?

The body had traveled thousands of miles.

The scenery had changed.

The people had changed.

The language had changed.

The seasons had changed.

Almost everything had changed.

Yet there was something that felt exactly the same.

The same awareness that looked through my eyes as a child in Western Australia was looking through my eyes on the opposite side of the Earth.

That moment stayed with me.

The more I reflected on it, the more curious I became.

Because the body had changed.

The places had changed.

My beliefs had changed.

My understanding of life had changed.

Yet there was something that felt unchanged.

And that led me to one of the central questions of yoga:

Who am I?



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WHO AM I?

So, Who am I?

Not my name.

Not my profession.

Not my history.

Not my successes.

Not my failures.

Who am I?

Have you ever asked that question?

This question has been asked by seekers for thousands of years.

Not as a philosophical exercise.

Not as an intellectual puzzle.

But as a doorway.

A doorway into direct experience.

If I am not the changing body...

If I am not my changing thoughts...

If I am not the changing emotions...

Then who am I?

The sages tell us that beneath all of these changing experiences there is something constant.

Something aware.

Something present.

Something that witnesses every thought, every feeling, every experience.

The body changes.

The mind changes.

The world changes.

Yet awareness remains.

Right now, as you sit here, notice that thoughts come and go.

Sensations come and go.

Feelings come and go.

But something is aware of them all.

What is that?

Yoga invites us to investigate this mystery for ourselves.

Not through theory.

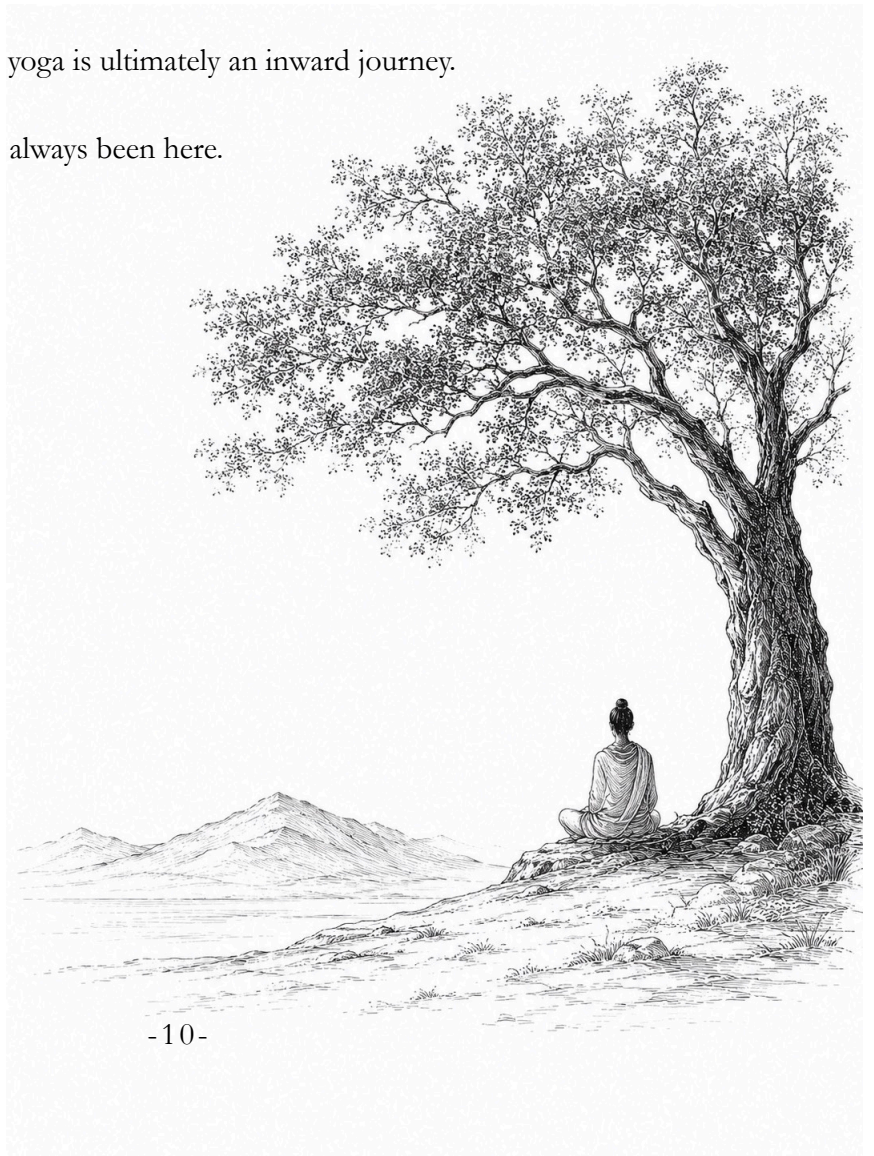
Through direct experience.

And perhaps that is why the journey of yoga is ultimately an inward journey.

Not toward something new.

But toward the recognition of what has always been here.

The recognition of our true nature.



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YOGA IS REMEMBERING

The more I walk this path, the more I have come to feel that yoga is not about becoming something.

It is about remembering.

Remembering what has always been present.

Remembering the peace that is already here.

Remembering the awareness that has accompanied us through every experience of our lives.

The practices of yoga are beautiful.

Asana.

Pranayama.

Meditation.

Mantra.

Selfless service.

All of these practices help prepare us.

But they are not creating our true nature.

They are helping us recognize it.

The sun does not need to be created. It only needs the clouds to move aside.

In the same way, yoga gently removes the obstacles that prevent us from recognizing what has always been here.

Swami Muktananda expressed this beautifully when he said:

"Honor your Self. Worship your Self. Meditate on your Self. God dwells within you as you."

When I first encountered those words, I found them both inspiring and mysterious.

What does it mean that God dwells within us as us?

Over time, I have come to understand that yoga is inviting us to discover this for ourselves.
Not through adopting a new identity.
Not through becoming more spiritual.
But through direct experience.
Through stillness.
Through awareness.
Through presence.

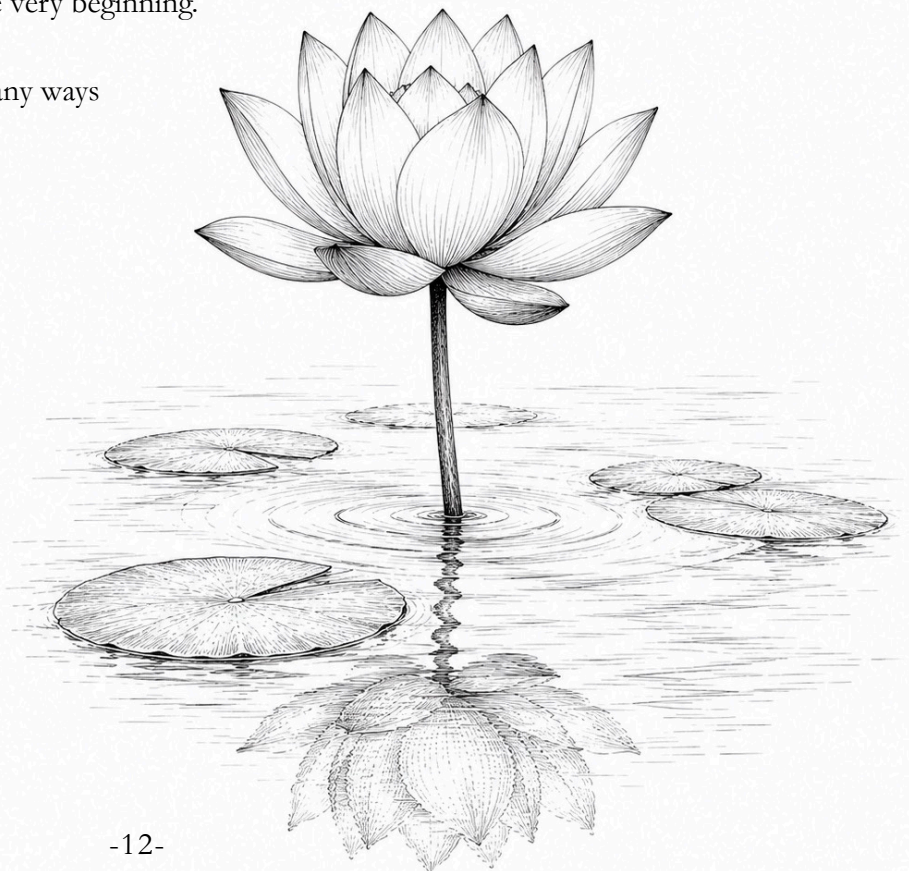
The more deeply we listen, the more we begin to notice that beneath the changing thoughts, changing emotions, and changing circumstances of life, there is a quiet presence that remains.

A presence that is already whole.
Already complete.
Already at peace.
And perhaps this is what we are remembering.
Not something new.
Something ancient.
Something intimate.
Something closer than our breath.

The Self.

The awareness that has been here from the very beginning.

And the beautiful thing is that there are many ways
to approach this discovery.



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THE MANY PATHS

One of the great beauties of yoga is that there are many doorways.

Some enter through service.

This is **Karma Yoga**. — the yoga of selfless action.

Serving without attachment to results.

Some enter through devotion.

This is **Bhakti Yoga** — the yoga of the heart

The path of love. The path of surrender.

Some enter through inquiry and wisdom

This is **Jnana Yoga** — the yoga of knowledge

Asking the timeless question: "Who am I?"

Some enter through meditation and inner practice

This is **Raja Yoga** — the royal path. The royal path of inner stillness.

These paths may appear different.

Yet they all lead toward the same realization.

The realization that we are not separate from life.

The realization of unity.

The realization of our true nature.

And in truth, most of us walk a little of each path.

We serve.

We love.

We question.

We meditate.

Life itself becomes the practice.

And every sincere step, taken with awareness, becomes part of the journey home.

For me, one of the most profound teachings on this journey came not from a book, but from a mountain.

A mountain that has drawn seekers for centuries.

Arunachala.



ARUNACHALA

This year Tanya and I traveled to southern India.

We had the great blessing to be drawn to the sacred mountain, Arunachala.

For centuries sages have spoken of Arunachala not merely as a mountain, but as a living presence.

As I sat there one morning, watching the mountain in silence, I realized something.

The mountain was teaching without words.

It was simply being itself.

Completely still.

Completely present.

Completely at peace.

And I understood something that day.

Presence itself is a teaching.

Sometimes the deepest wisdom is not spoken.

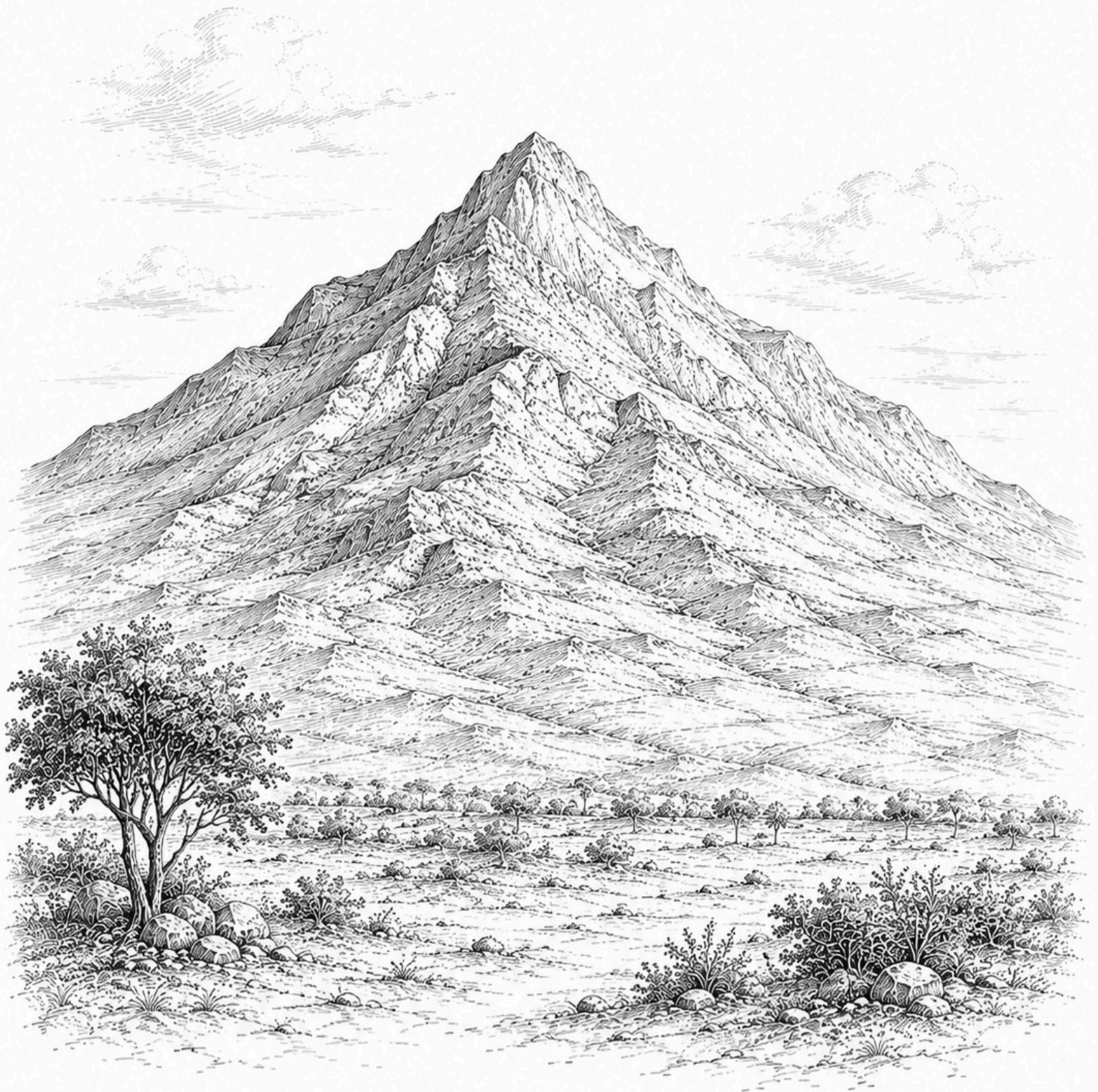
It is embodied.

This is yoga.

Not adding more.

Not becoming more.

Simply resting more deeply in what is.



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THE BODY AS A TEMPLE

For many people, the journey into yoga begins with the body.
It certainly did for me.

We arrive seeking flexibility.
Strength.
Balance.
Health.

And these are all wonderful gifts.

But over time, yoga begins to reveal something deeper.

The body is not simply a collection of muscles and bones.
It is not an obstacle to spiritual life.
It is not something to overcome.

The body is a doorway.
A temple.
A sacred place in which awareness can awaken.

Every posture invites us to become present.
Every breath invites us to listen.
Every sensation becomes an opportunity to meet ourselves more fully.

The purpose of yoga is not to perfect the pose.
The purpose is to awaken presence.
To inhabit this moment completely.
To be here.

Yoga honors the body.

**Not because the body is who we are.
But because the body is where we are.**

And this moment, right here, is where life is unfolding.

The body teaches us humility.

The body teaches us patience.

The body teaches us impermanence.

And when approached with awareness, the body becomes one of our greatest teachers.

It teaches us how to listen.

How to soften.

How to trust.

How to be present.

The more deeply we inhabit the body, the more we begin to recognize something remarkable.

The body is constantly changing.

Yet awareness remains.

Breath after breath.

Moment after moment.

Awareness remains.

And perhaps this is why the breath has always held such a special place in yoga.

The breath lives at the meeting point of body, mind, and spirit.

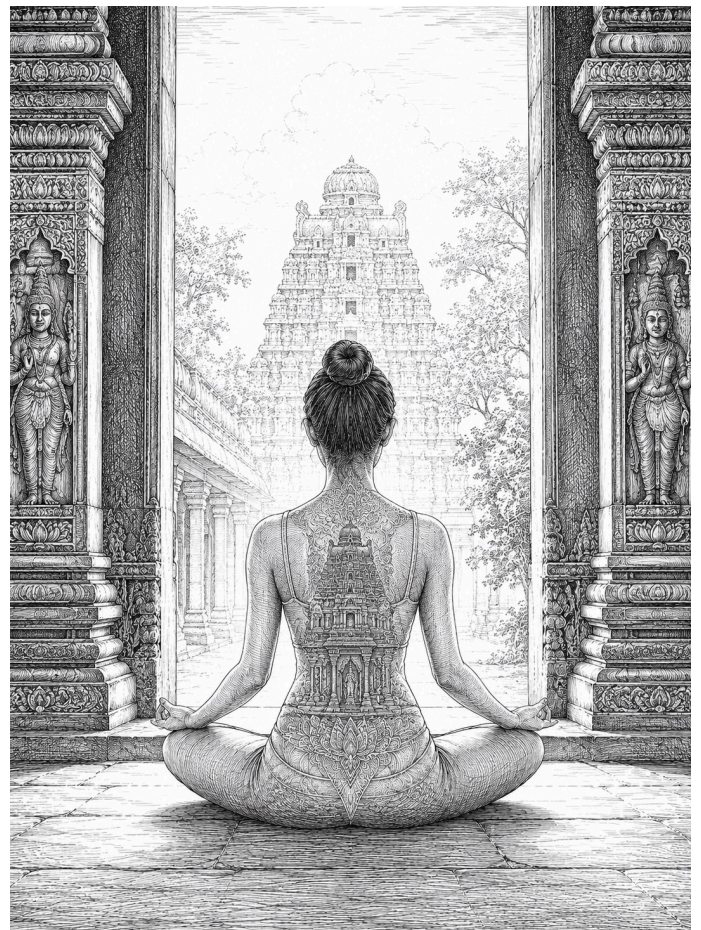
It is always here.

Always available.

Always inviting us back to the present moment.

And so we come to one of yoga's greatest gifts.

The gift of breath.



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THE GIFT OF BREATH

If there is one companion that has been with us from the beginning of life until this very moment, it is the breath.

The breath was there when we arrived in this world.
And one day, it will accompany us as we leave it.

Between those two moments, every experience of our lives unfolds upon the rhythm of the breath.

Yet how often do we truly notice it?

How often do we pause long enough to listen?

One of the great gifts of yoga is that it brings us back into relationship with the breath.
Not as a technique.
Not as a tool.

But as a living expression of life itself.
The breath connects body and mind.

When the mind is restless, the breath reflects it.
When the mind is calm, the breath reflects that too.

And when we consciously bring our attention to the breath, something remarkable begins to happen.

We return.
We return to the body.
We return to the present moment.
We return to ourselves.

In the yogic tradition, the breath is more than air moving in and out of the lungs.
It is connected to prana — the life force that animates all living things.

Every breath becomes a reminder that life is happening now.
Not yesterday.
Not tomorrow.
Now.

The breath asks nothing from us.

It does not ask us to believe anything.

It does not ask us to become anyone.

It simply invites us to be present.

One conscious breath.

Then another.

Then another.

And sometimes that is enough.

Enough to soften.

Enough to listen.

Enough to remember.

In a world that often pulls our attention in every direction,
the breath remains a faithful guide.

Always here.

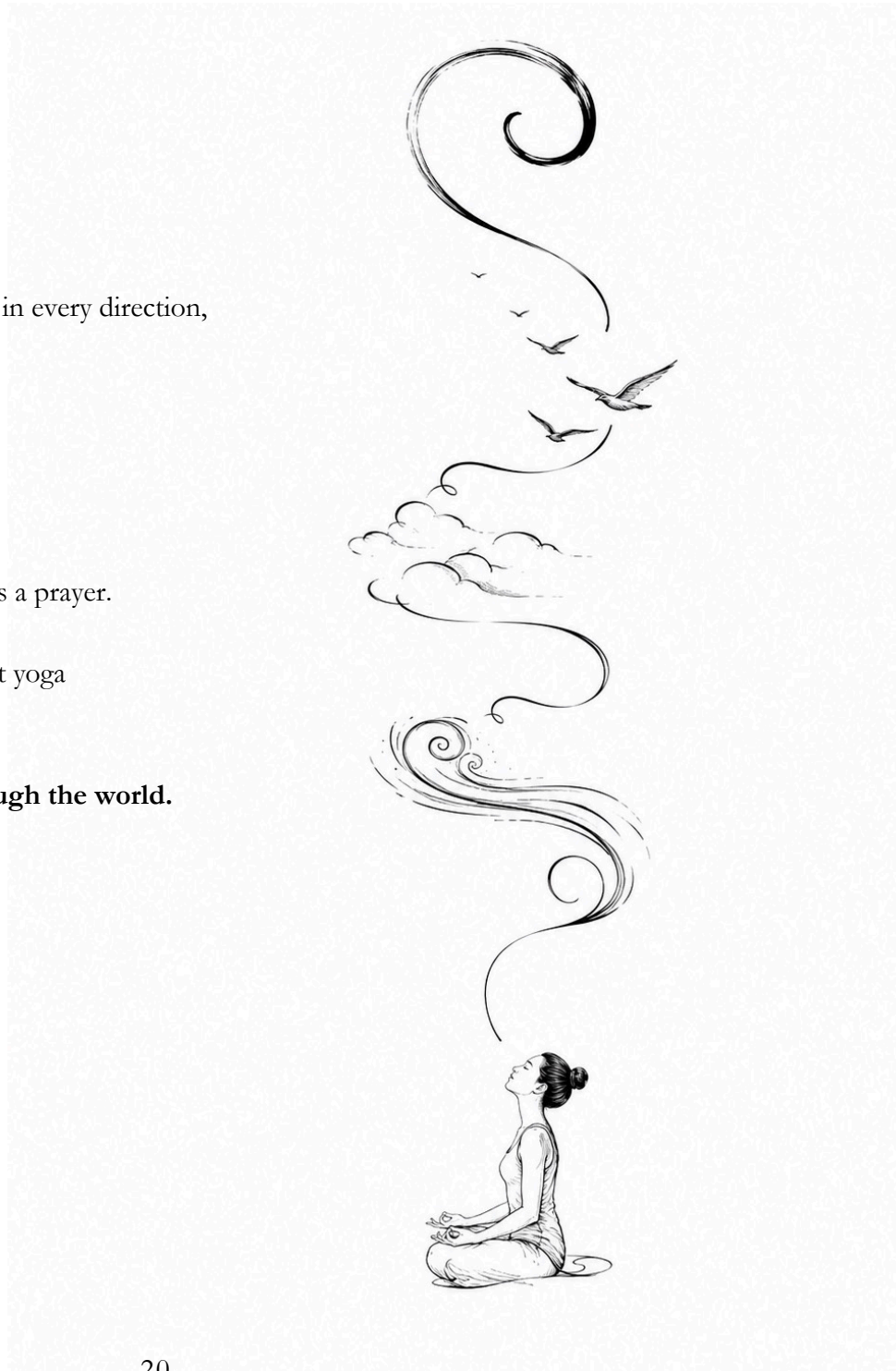
Always waiting.

Always available.

Because every conscious breath becomes a prayer.

And eventually we begin to discover that yoga
does not end when we leave the mat.

Yoga continues in how we walk through the world.



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YOGA IN DAILY LIFE

As we reflect on all of this, a natural question arises:

What happens when we leave the meditation cushion?

What happens when we leave the yoga mat?

What happens when we return to our homes, our families, our work, and the responsibilities of daily life?

Because ultimately, yoga is not something that happens for one hour each day.

Yoga is a way of living.

A way of meeting each moment.

A way of relating to ourselves, to others, and to life itself.

The real test of yoga is not what happens in the yoga hall.

The real test of yoga is what happens when life becomes challenging.

Can we remain present?

Can we listen deeply?

Can we respond rather than react?

Can we meet ourselves and others with compassion?

Yoga continues in how we speak.

Yoga continues in how we listen.

Yoga continues in how we serve.

Yoga continues in how we love.

Every conversation becomes an opportunity to practice awareness.

Every challenge becomes an opportunity to practice patience.

Every relationship becomes an opportunity to practice compassion.

Life itself becomes the practice.

Over the years, we have come to see that some of the most profound expressions of yoga are also the simplest.

Listening to someone who needs to be heard.
Offering kindness when it is unexpected.
Taking a conscious breath before speaking.
Showing up fully for the person in front of us.

These moments may seem ordinary.
Yet yoga teaches us that the sacred is often hidden within the ordinary.

We do not need to withdraw from life to practice yoga.

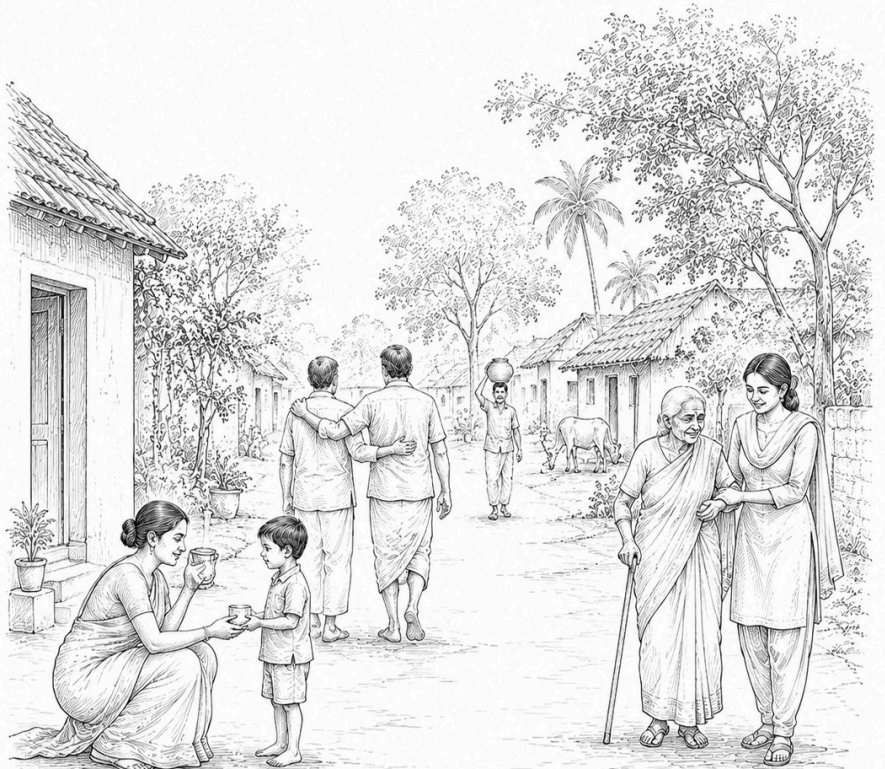
Life itself becomes the practice.
The family becomes the practice.
The workplace becomes the practice.
The community becomes the practice.

Every moment becomes an opportunity to remember.

And perhaps this is why yoga remains so relevant today.
Because the world does not need more perfect yogis.

The world needs more presence.
More compassion.
More understanding.
More love.

The mat prepares us.
Life is the practice.



12

CLOSING REFLECTION

As I reflect on the Path of Yoga, I find myself returning to that simple moment with the inflatable globe.
Standing there in North Carolina.

Looking at the opposite side of the Earth.
Realizing that I had traveled as far away from my birthplace as a human being can go.

And yet...

I was still here.

That realization continues to stay with me.

Because it reminds me that while so much in life changes, something remains.

The body changes.
The mind changes.
Our circumstances change.
Our understanding changes.
The world around us is constantly changing.

Yet there is something within us that quietly witnesses it all.
Something present through every chapter of our lives.
Something present through every joy and every sorrow.
Something present through every beginning and every ending.

Yoga invites us to discover that for ourselves.

Through presence.
Through awareness.
Through remembering.

Because it speaks to something universal within every human being.

The longing to know who we truly are.
The longing to come home to ourselves.
The longing to recognize the peace that has always been present beneath the movement of life.

And so, after all the journeys...
After all the practices...
After all the seeking...

We may discover something beautifully simple.

What we have been searching for has never been absent.

It has been here all along.

Closer than thought.
Closer than breath.
Closer than any destination we could ever reach.

You can travel to the opposite side of the Earth... but you can never travel away from your Self.



13

MEDITATION

Let's take a gentle breath together.

Allow the eyes to close.

Feel the breath entering.

Feel the breath leaving.

Nothing to change.

Nothing to become.

Simply rest.

Aware.

Present.

Whole.

Lokah Samastah Sukhino Bhavantu

May all beings be happy.

May all beings be peaceful.

May all beings be free.

May your practice lead you not somewhere else, but more deeply into the miracle of being exactly where you are.

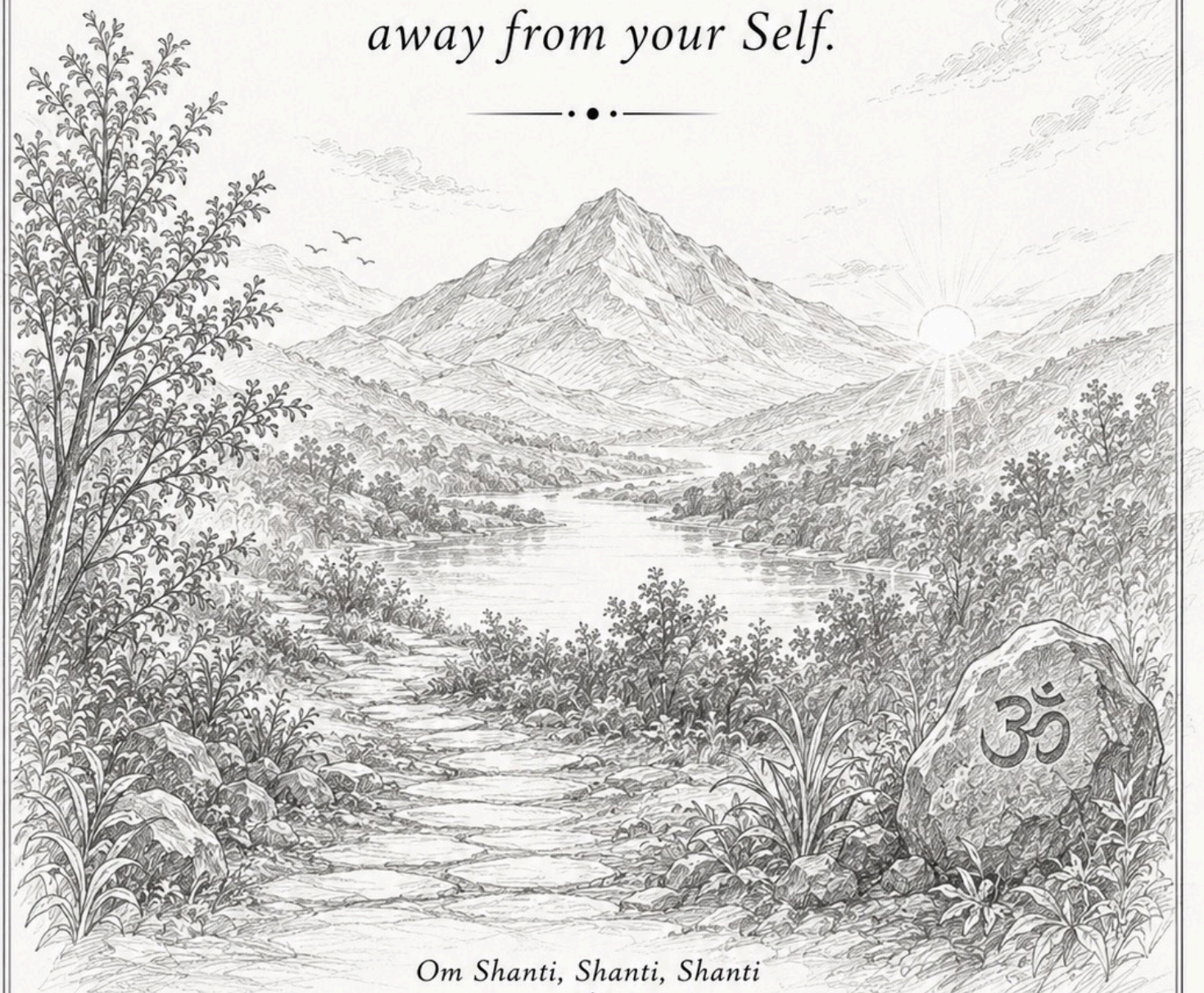
Om Shanti, Shanti, Shanti.



— • —

*You can travel to
the opposite side of the Earth...
but you can never travel
away from your Self.*

— • • —



Om Shanti, Shanti, Shanti

— • —

Shaun Simmons