

JIVAMUKTI YOGA

SHARON GANNON
AND DAVID LIFE



BALLANTINE BOOKS

Praise for
JIVAMUKTI YOGA

“Jivamukti has been a big influence in my life. I’ve read this book twice and expect to read it many more times. It’s the bible of my spiritual practice.”

—RUSSELL SIMMONS

CEO of Rush Communications and cofounder of DefJam Records

“David and Sharon are great teachers in the fullest sense of the word—as guides and mentors they challenge and inspire. Their book gives readers a glimpse of the power of yoga to transform lives.”

—TRUDIE STYLER

Cofounder of the Rainforest Foundation

“Sharon and David sing the essence of yoga in their new book Jivamukti Yoga. Their book is amazingly accessible without being compromising to the tradition of yoga. In the same breath I applaud them for their courage to be creative and daring in expressing their unique and gifted voices.”

—RODNEY YEE

“Sharon and David have been able to touch so many people through the dance of life. Embracing the true sense of yoga: the union of mind, body, and spirit. They have the unique ability to create a space in New York and for New Yorkers where one is able to balance the outer craziness with the inner calming world. At the same time, they are able to captivate and enhance their own creativity and share it with so many others.”

—DONNA KARAN

“David and Sharon have given us a profound gift in this very readable, tangible road map that provides a means to experience our own unlimited potential, our true selves. It also allows us to see god, even if just a glimpse. May all beings go on to experience these gifts, and apply them to every facet of their lives. God bless.”

—MIKE D

Beastie Boys

“If you’re not fortunate enough to study with David and Sharon, here’s perhaps the next best thing. A book filled with their personal reflections and philosophy. The knowledge expressed in this book instructs and inspires.”

—WILLEM DAFOE

“Sharon and David make a great gift with this book; they open up the world of yoga in a personal and down-to-earth way that makes it live for today, while bravely sharing their holistic vision of yoga as transforming union with absolutely everything, bringing together body, mind, loving spirit, society, all beings, the divine, and the divinely human.”

—ROBERT A. THURMAN

Author of *Inner Revolution* Translator of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*

“Purifying, liberating, uplifting: the gentlest, most knowing guide from two most gentle, knowing gurus. They clear away all the tangly bits from the path to pure joy. Can you imagine: enlightenment made easy for anyone who wishes to discover the best in themselves and the hidden happiness in life!”

—INGRID NEWKIRK

Cofounder and president of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA)

“This wonderful book, the Jivamukti method for the ancient art of yoga, is the next step in an authentic and living lineage, from two great teachers who really care about their tradition and—most important—about their students.”

—GESHE MICHAEL ROACH

**Director of the Asian Classics Institute
Author of *The Garden and The Diamond Cutter***

“Jivamukti Yoga is a treasure-house of insights and information that can be of great help to anyone seriously following a yogic path.”

—JOHN ROBBINS

Author of *Diet for a New America* and *The Food Revolution*

“David and Sharon aim to teach yoga for liberation, in all ways, and this book is their manifesto for liberating yoga from the fetters of the humdrum, the predictable, the conventional.”

—DR. ROBERT E. SVOBODA

Leading Ayurvedic scholar and bestselling author of *Ayurveda: Life, Health and Longevity*

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Cats and Dogs Are People Too!
The Art of Yoga



JIVAMUKTI
Y O G A

SHARON GANNON AND DAVID LIFE

Ballantine Books
New York

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Consult your physician before beginning this or any yoga program. The instructions in this book are in no way intended as a substitute for medical counseling. The authors disclaim any liability for loss, personal and otherwise, resulting from the procedures in this book.

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To all Jivamukti students
past, present, and future

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The middle of the night, somewhere over the north Pacific in the back of a DC-10 at 35,000 feet ...

The plane is empty but for my band, the crew, and me—forty tired guys sleeping on too many working nights in a row. Each night a different city, sometimes a different country or even a different continent. None of us has slept in our own bed for months, but nine hours in a DC-10 is as good a place as any to catch up on some sleep.

Only I'm not sleeping. While my crew and bandmates are snoring and dreaming of home, I'm standing on my head between the bulkhead and the empty economy section.

The stewardesses have been giving me strange looks since I began my yoga practice an hour ago. Now, don't get me wrong, I'm as tired as everybody else is. But when I saw the space on the floor, I knew how I wanted to use my time. I wanted to practice yoga.

I can see the full moon out of the little window. I feel the vibrations of the engines through the floor from my head up to my feet. It sounds like OM to the power of six thousand horses. I'm vibrating with it upside down with an inverted smile on my face. This is truly flying.

They say when the pupil is ready, the teacher will appear. My yoga journey began in 1991. My first teacher, Danny, walked into my studio in London and asked if I wanted to learn about yoga. I had no idea what yoga was but I was intrigued enough to ask him to show me. Which he did. I was impressed by both his quiet confidence and the strength and flexibility that he demonstrated. I was even more impressed after I had tried to emulate some of his movements.

I had always thought myself as fit. My job demands it. I was an athlete when I was younger and ran every day. But could I bend forward and lay my palms on the floor with straight legs? No way. Nor could I complete a simple sun salutation without huffing and puffing like an old train. This teacher's breath had been smooth and effortless. I asked him to come to my house the next day and teach me.

Not so coincidentally, my house in London used to belong to Yehudi Menuhin, the violin maestro. It was Mr. Menuhin who first brought Mr. B.K.S. Iyengar to London in the 1950s to teach yoga. The garden where they practiced daily overlooks a vast park with huge old trees. Menuhin even wrote the foreword to Mr. Iyengar's book *Light on Yoga* in 1966.

I feel blessed to practice in that house and partake of the accumulated *sadhana*, and of the knowledge of and dedication to yoga. I'd like to think that some of their dedication has rubbed off on me, as I have now been practicing yoga six days a week for ten years. And I believe that yoga has provided me with energy and focus that I would not have possessed otherwise.

My work as a performer is physically demanding, and my work as a songwriter challenges my imagination. Yoga practice has enhanced my capacity in both areas. My duties as a husband and a father, as well as my ability to deal with other relationships, have all been enhanced by a yoga practice that has become inextricably bound to every aspect of my life.

Through yoga practice I've sought to know my Self and have managed to gain a number of insights. For example, I now *feel* that my body carries within it a holographically complete record of everything it has experienced in fifty years. My fears, my prejudices, and my

doubts are all somehow reflected in the structure and musculature of my body. Where it is closed and unyielding, resistant to change, I find that I am holding fast to emotional wounds suffered in the past. When I am confident, fearless, and open, this, too, is reflected in the ease with which my body moves.

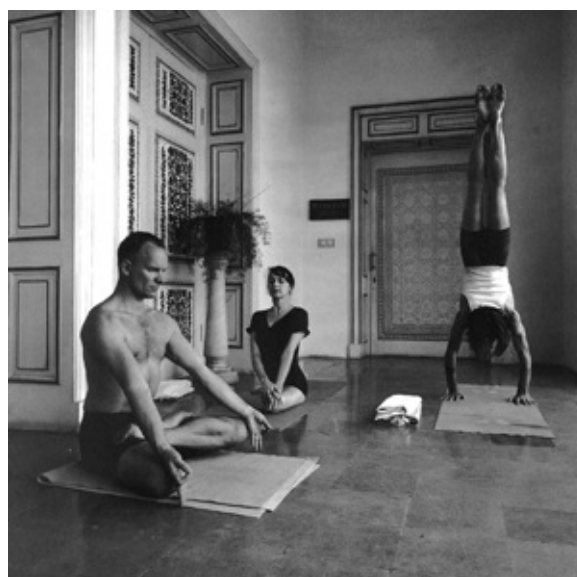
My yoga practice has given me tools for facing and processing aspects of the unconscious that otherwise could remain hidden and frustrating for a lifetime. It has been a task in my practice of yoga to feel the unlimited aspects of Self as well as to explore and challenge the physical aspects—both pleasant and painful.

This challenge is emotional, intellectual, psychological, physical, and spiritual. I feel that there is an interpenetration between the mind, the body, and the spirit of God within. What I think about affects the subtle bodies as well as the physical body, and, in turn, the physical functioning affects mind, emotion, intellect, and what I call soul. There is no separation. That is what I have learned.

We have entered a new millennium and I'm happy to be called on to express my strong belief in the Jivamukti Yoga method. In his book, Iyengar brilliantly enumerated the minutiae of expressions of the body, mind, and breath. In this book, David and Sharon reconstruct the flowing dance of life in both outer and inner yoga practices. They have been friends and teachers to Trudie and me for many years now. David and Sharon have inspired and encouraged us to think of yoga not just as a system of exercises but also as a door to the infinite. The book you are holding in your hand is a result of a lifetime of experience, knowledge, and passion and is a manual for living that is deeply meaningful and profound. This book is a royal gift to the world.

I feel a subtle change in the vibration of the airplane. We are starting our descent as the first light of day pierces the eastern horizon. The lights of New Orleans sparkle below us and I give thanks for the new day. I give thanks for my teachers and their lineage. I give thanks for all of those who will read this book and continue their journey to Self-knowing and Bliss.

Namaste, Sting



From left to right: Sting, Sharon, David practicing yoga in Jaipur, India, 1998.

Photographer: Martin Brading



Photographer: Dewey Nicks

It's kind of fun to do the impossible.

—Walt Disney

It is said that two people cannot satisfy their thirsts from the same fountain and have different taste in their mouths. There is only one yoga, even though there are many brand names for it. Some “brands” of yoga are based on breaking apart the various yoga practices, such as *asana* (postures) and *pranayama* (breath restriction), and studying them individually. This can help the beginning practitioner build a sound foundation. But if our practices are only deconstructed, how will the joining of the mortal and finite small self to the eternal and infinite Self that is the true aim of yoga take place?

Jivamukti Yoga is our brand name, but our method is not based on deconstructing the yoga practices. Jivamukti Yoga is our attempt to reintegrate the physical, psychological, and spiritual aspects of yoga for Western practitioners. We are dedicated to teaching yoga as spiritual practice, and to reminding our students that they are committing themselves to a demanding mystical journey toward enlightenment. We have created a yoga method that provides direction for this journey.

When you were a child, perhaps you took apart a clock or a radio, or some other mechanical device. You probably soon realized that it was easier to take it apart than to put it back together again! In general, taking things apart is easier than putting them back together—but you don't *really* know how something works until you can put it back together. In this book we are going to put yoga practices back together that were taken apart (some were even discarded) by curious Americans when yoga was first brought to the United States.

Swami Vivekananda introduced yoga to the West in 1893 at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago. He described practices developed thousands of years ago by sages called *rishis* who were seeking to experience a blissful state they called “Yoga,” meaning union with God. The practices they developed helped them experience Yoga by shifting identification from body and mind toward the Divine or Cosmic eternal Self. (The identification with body and mind is called “ego,” and constitutes the small self.)

The *rishis* were seeking Self-realization, which is also called God-realization, enlightenment, *samadhi*, or bliss. They wanted to put themselves back together.

Although many great Indian teachers visited the United States after Swami Vivekananda, they found it difficult to communicate the full physical, psychological, and spiritual scope of yoga to a culture in which the existence of God was a debatable subject. Some of the yoga practices did take hold, though. The practice of *asana* postures, for example, was accepted as a useful exercise program that could increase flexibility and mobility, rehabilitate injuries, and encourage weight loss. Meditation was promoted as a stress-reduction technique. But the true aim of yoga was glossed over.

Spiritually, we Americans were children when the yogis came to show us their practices, and, like children, we took them apart to examine them. In doing so we discovered some

useful exercises that can improve one's quality of life. But studying yoga as disparate useful exercises is rather like taking a camera apart and wondering why the disassembled parts aren't enabling you to take a picture.

We hope to encourage you to move beyond studying the various interesting shapes and attributes of the yoga practices and start fitting them back together. After all, the aim of yoga is not a better body or a calmer mind, even though the practices may improve your body and calm your mind. The aim is enlightenment, the state in which everything fits together.

From our earliest classes, we have tried to teach a living translation of the Indian system of yoga that Western minds like ours can comprehend. It is this translation that we have set down in this book. That is why you'll find chapters here about asana and meditation, as well as chapters about equally important practices like *ahimsa* (nonviolence) and *bhakti* (devotion). Don't be concerned if you are not familiar with these Sanskrit words, because by the time you finish this book, you will understand them and many others. (This book includes a comprehensive glossary. Words, except for proper nouns, included in the glossary are italicized the first time they appear in the book.) You will also become familiar with the great range of inner and outer yoga practices that the rishis developed to help us reach the state of Yoga, or union with the Divine Self.

The chapters on asana don't focus on teaching individual asanas—plenty of books already exist that do. Instead, we teach *vinyasa krama*, the art of sequencing asana postures. Asana sequences are illustrated with photos and integrated into classes you can practice on your own, beginning in [Chapter 6](#), “Prana: Freeing the Life Force.” This book also gives instructions for specific techniques for pranayama (breath restriction), *kriya* (purification), and meditation. We do recommend, however, that you study concomitantly with a qualified yoga teacher.

We became teachers because we were driven to communicate something extraordinary about human potential. Our passion is to teach yoga as a spiritual practice. We are both artists, so we believe that teaching can be an inspired, creative act. The creative desire to liberate people out of the mundane that first inspired us as artists became the foundation of the Jivamukti Yoga method.

When our informal classes had outgrown a friend's apartment on Avenue B in Manhattan's East Village, we decided to open the Jivamukti Yoga Center in 1989. We chose the name Jivamukti (pronounced Jee-va-mook-tee) Yoga to reflect the true aim of yoga, which is liberation.

Jiva means individual soul and *mukti* means liberation. The exact transliteration of the Sanskrit word from which we derived Jivamukti is *jivanmuktih*, which means liberation *while* living. The name Jivamukti Yoga reflects the fact that it is possible to have a beneficial and fulfilling life in the world, and also progress spiritually—perhaps even attaining liberation (*samadhi*) while living.

Jiva, the individual soul, is bound by *maya*, the world of forms, phenomena, and time. The experience of jiva is the experience of birth, growth, and death. You were born, you

are now growing and changing, and one day you will die. Birth and death are for the physical body. After death the individual soul is free from its present physical body and will pick up another one, according to its *karma*. This process of birth, growth, and death is called *samsara*. Samsara is the wheel of life and death. Samsara means suffering the condition of individualization. Samsara goes on and on until liberation. What is liberation? It is when the jiva realizes that it is not individual, but that it is Absolute. With enlightenment there is automatic liberation from all karma. The jivanmukta is freed from all past, present, and future karma—all actions from beginningless time are dissolved.

Yoga provides practices for the body and mind that can liberate the individual soul. Yoga frees the soul to merge with God and realize that it is not separate from any other thing. Yoga even in modern India, as we discovered on our extensive travels there, yoga is rarely practiced with liberation as its goal. Most modern Indians consider yoga merely a collection of exercises for increasing flexibility and losing weight. You cannot journey to India, as some students have assumed, to find the “original Jivamukti Yoga Center.”

We, on the other hand, have believed from the beginning that liberation is the *only* reason to practice yoga! By immersing ourselves in the ancient scriptures that form yoga's philosophical foundation, and through meditation, contemplation, and the encouragement of the great teachers we were blessed to meet, we have been graced with insights that have enabled us to create a yoga method that combines contemplation of the yogic scriptures and meditation with a challenging Hatha Yoga practice.

Perhaps because we are musicians, we also believed from the start that music could play an invaluable role in a yoga method dedicated to enlightenment. That's why we play uplifting music during asana practice and teach our students to sing Sanskrit chants.

Jivamukti Yoga is also our attempt to offer a form of ethical social activism. This activism is not aimed at overthrowing existing governments or even critiquing them. Jivamukti Yoga is the practice of internal revolution, of liberating the only prisoner you can really free: your soul.

Yoga philosophy states that liberation and happiness are available to each being, regardless of species, race, sex, or religion. Deep inside, we all instinctively realize this, but that realization is typically obscured by our thoughts, which tend to argue otherwise. The aim of yoga, therefore, is not to change the world but to change our minds. That is a more profoundly political act than overthrowing any government.

Some people will say that they don't want to be political. Well, you can't help but be political. Every action, every choice you make affects us all. To say that you are political is to say that you care about the world we all live in. Caring for others will bring you closer to liberation sooner than anything else will. And yoga provides a wonderful template for responsible action.

Will there be a movement of cool heroism in America? Will we be able to produce and support such leaders here? If so, could he or she win power? What would be the campaign strategy in line with the politics of enlightenment? How do we as individuals

develop cool heroism ourselves? How do we engage in the politics of enlightenment on the day to day level?

—Professor Robert Thurman, *Inner Revolution*¹

The yoga practices use the body and mind as tools for liberation because these hold clues to all the mysteries of the universe. But why do you want to change your body and your mind? What are your motives? As Krishna the chariot driver tells Arjuna the prince in the ancient yogic text, the *Bhagavad Gita*, we must act perfectly and devote the fruit of our actions to God. This means that our actions must not be selfish or self-absorbed, because most of the world's problems stem from selfishness.

When we relinquish selfishness as our motivating principle, the potential for true happiness opens up. From compassion toward others you will realize happiness for yourself. Through service to all beings you will experience the bliss of the end of suffering for yourself.

Replace the question “What will yoga do for me?” with “How may I serve thee, Lord?” Love be your guide. When you love what you do, the means to do it will be revealed to you.

The practices of yoga are ethically sound. They enhance the physical body, refine the emotions, challenge the intellect, and reveal the soul. As long as your primary motivation is concerned with what yoga can do for you, however, your suffering will continue unabated and your yoga practice will be binding, not liberating.

Yoga practices clean the mind. The dirt that is cleaned away is the dirt of *avidya*—ignorance of your true identity, which is the Divine Self. In this way, yoga helps us bridge the separation between our individual souls and their Divine Source. It helps us trace our way backward from where we are now to where we came from.

The Greek word *apocalypse* means to uncover, to reveal. The result of yoga practice is enlightenment, which is an apocalyptic event. Enlightenment is the uncovering of the self that reveals *Atman*, the I-Am, the God in you.

Jivamukti Yoga is not a passive practice. The life of the *jivanmukta* is not normal. A normal life is one spent trying to avoid pain and seek pleasure. The *jivanmukta*, on the other hand, experiences pain and pleasure with equanimity, understanding that everything we experience is the karmic result of past actions. The *jivanmukta* realizes that even though the past cannot be undone, he or she can affect the future by what he or she does here and now. The *jivanmukta* never loses sight of joy as the goal.

We hope that you will use Jivamukti Yoga to progress toward liberation. We want to foster independent practitioners who are curious and excited and who are not looking for someone to stroke them and control their lives. The method of yoga is practical. The proof of the method is in its results. You can test it for yourself. We encourage you to read scriptures that form yoga's philosophical base, such as Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* and the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, and form your own opinions.

If you reflect on the texts, you will start having your own insights. They will come to you in magical little explosions that will feel like things you've always known but didn't know how to express.

Consciousness is chemical. Physiologically speaking, all the yoga practices lay the groundwork for such insights to occur by stimulating the endocrine glands, altering the brain chemistry, and helping you develop psychokinetic skills that promote contemplation. But the longing for liberation that you will uncover was always within you.

From joy all beings have come, by joy they all live, and unto joy they all return.

—Taittiriya Upanishad²

What Is Yoga?

The Sanskrit word *yoga* is derived from the root *yuj*, which means to yoke. The yoga practitioner seeks to yoke his or her individual soul with cosmic consciousness.

When oxen are yoked they are still separated, held slightly apart, but they walk in the same direction, on the same path. The various yoga practices are like the yoking mechanism—they put you on the path, and direct you as you walk toward God. They make you available for the possibility that you might experience a graceful dissolution of the yoke and the merger with the Divine called *samadhi*.

In a sense, this is what we request when we say this prayer: “Not my will, but Thy will, be done.” We are requesting that the yoke be put around our necks. We are seeking to merge our own will with that of the higher Self, which is the Divine. We are attempting, through these practices that have been developed over thousands of years, to yoke our individual experiences as small selves with the Source of our being, so that we can overcome the illusion of separateness from that Source.

The teachings of yoga are Self-revealed and prehistoric. No one invented union with the Divine; in fact, Patanjali, who compiled the Yoga Sutras over five thousand years ago, wrote that these teachings are available in the natural world around us. We can observe them in ourselves if we are willing to look with the detachment of a sage. We can experience them through the yoga practices.

Yoga practices such as *asana* enable us to *feel* that there’s something animating our physical form. Yoga practices such as meditation enable us to watch our minds think, to realize that we must be more than the mind, if we can sit back and watch it generate thoughts. This is the power of these practices: they show, rather than tell, us who we really are. When you feel the pulsation of the life force during *asana* practice, you can begin to let go of your identification with your physical body. When you can watch your mind, your identification with it will begin to subside. All yoga practices enable us to feel that there is something animating our physical form and to watch our minds at work and realize that we must be more than the body and mind.

Yoga practices help us to achieve spiritual understanding and to integrate that understanding into daily life. Sometimes people confuse yoga practices with various New Age methods of integrating body and mind in pursuit of “health.” Although these methods can improve health, the body and mind represent only a portion of the five bodies—physical, vital, emotional, intellectual, and bliss—that yoga practices integrate. Your idea of what is possible limits your possibilities. Why settle for just physical results when you could have Cosmic Consciousness? Why settle for a banana when you could have nirvana?

“I’m interested in the mind-body connection,” a reporter once told us.

“The mind and body are intimately connected,” we replied. “They were both born, and both will die.”

What will not die is the soul, the spiritual Self, which is beyond body and mind, beyond personality, beyond ego. Our goal as yoga practitioners is to free ourselves from selfishness.

and strengthen our connection to this Self. Yoga is the joining of the separate self with the universal Self; it is a process of synthesis.

Most people are not truly interested in disturbing the illusion of separation between the small self and the universal Self. It can be frightening to contemplate the dissolution of your personality, of your ego, of yourself. Our culture provides us with so many tools we can use to further that separation. We can use analysis, language, religion, science, and even yoga practice to strengthen our small selves.

We Westerners are very attracted to breaking things apart. We have this notion that doing so will yield “the truth.” This approach can have a negative effect on our yoga practice, however. It can tempt us to divide the asanas into the ones we like and the ones we don’t like. Or to separate our good days from our bad days, and practice only on our good days. The true goal of yoga practice, however, is *to perceive the sameness in all, simultaneously with our experience of all differences.*

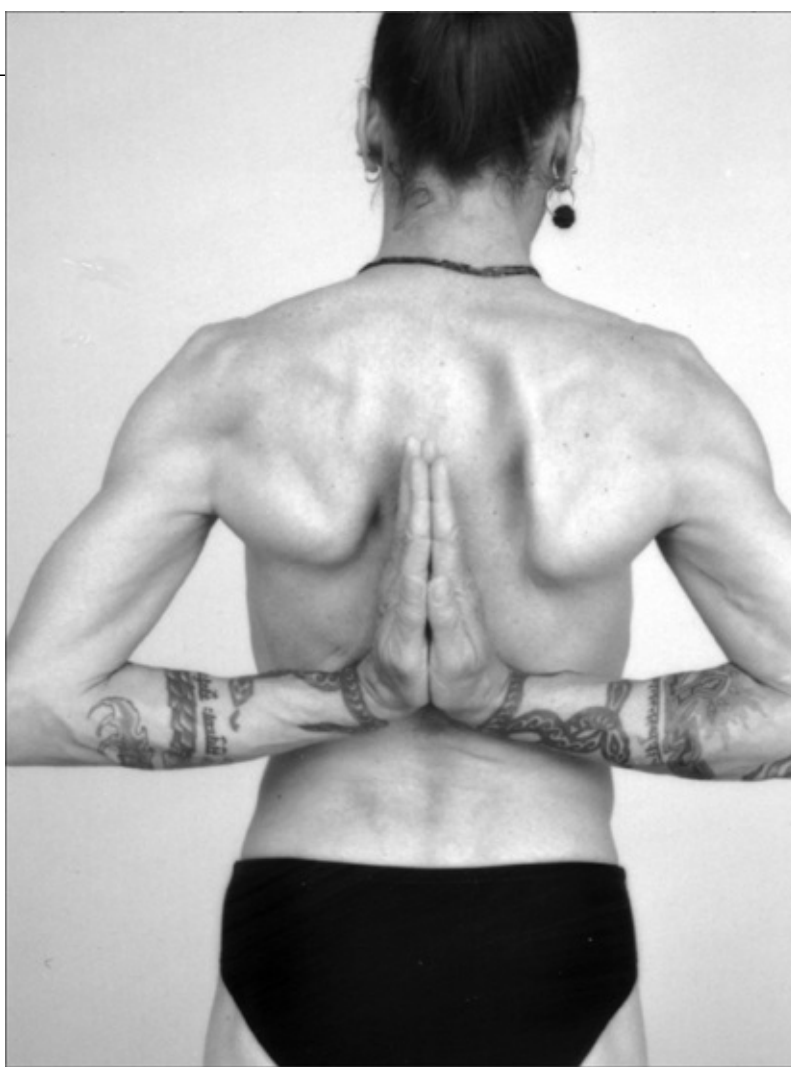
We also have a habit in this culture of giving less credibility to the unseen than the seen. Yet we are all profoundly affected by the unseen all the time. We suffer from anxiety, sadness, depression, despair, and confusion, for example. The practices of yoga equip us with tools for transcending this suffering—and for transcending our moments of happiness, too. Even moments of elation, contentment, and joy carry the future pain of their termination after all.

The practices of yoga will help you maintain equanimity in all situations by teaching you to become transparent, able to allow both joy and sorrow to flow through you without destroying your peace of mind.

No one can “do yoga.” Yoga means union with God. Yoga means *eternal* happiness, bliss, joy, and unconditional love. Yoga is who you are. It is your natural state. What we *can* do are practices that, by revealing to us our resistance to existing in our natural state, may lead us to it. But the intention underlying all our practices must be clear. The motivation underlying the yoga practices must be Yoga, union with the Divine Self. For any practice to be a yoga practice, one must consciously and continuously cultivate a desire for Self-realization. When we experience Yoga, we experience freedom from suffering and pain here and now, freedom that does not end.

Where are you, but here and now?

—Sky Cries Mary, “Chickaboom Cocktail”



Jivamukti Yoga

Putting Yoga Together in the West

*The jivanmukta is not transformed by pleasure or pain.
Joy does not exalt the mukta, nor is the mukta depressed by pain.
The jivanmukta no longer regards the world as real....
The jivanmukta is pure like akasha....
The jivanmukta is neither subject to attachment, nor to egoism.
The jivanmukta does not fear the world,
Nor does the world fear the jivanmukta
The jivanmukta is at peace with the ways of the world.
The mukta is free from worldly-mindedness ...
Finally, the jivanmukta maintains a cool head.*

—Vidyaranya, *The Jivan-Mukti-Viveka*

Jivamukti Yoga incorporates traditional yoga practices into a modern lifestyle without losing sight of the ancient, universal goal of liberation. We believe that liberation is possible even while living a modern urban lifestyle anywhere in the world. We believe that the ancient teachings and techniques of yoga, as laid out in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, are as valid and exciting today as they were over five thousand years ago.

If you explore yoga yourself by reading the texts, chanting, practicing asanas, and meditating, you will begin to feel that it's not foreign or separate from you. It is not *not* of you or of your culture. You do not have to be Hindu to read the scriptures or practice yoga, although familiarity with Hinduism and the history of Indian philosophy is certainly helpful.

Hinduism is a religion, based on a way of life called *Sanatana Dharma*, or the Universal Way. It includes four pillars: (1) vegetarianism, (2) an acknowledgment of the law of karma (the law of cause and effect), (3) a belief in reincarnation, and (4) a belief in the possibility of *moksha*, or liberation from all forms of suffering. True Hinduism incorporates all religions because it recognizes that if you have a way that works for you, it is valid—it comes under the umbrella of the Universal Way. Certainly there are many religious, racial, and class divisions in India, but what we came away with from our travels there was this essence of universality.

Yoga is not a religion; it is a school of practical philosophy. Yoga practices, however, are inextricably linked to the development of both Hinduism and the philosophical schools including Yoga, Vedanta, Samkhya, Jainism, and Buddhism, which developed in ancient India. Their codevelopment in the modern era has commonality in language, myth, root teachings, practices, and beliefs.

When we began teaching yoga, we set ourselves this challenge: to relate the ancient teachings to modern experience without dumbing down the yoga practices or sacrificing the original aim, which was always and only to experience union with the Divine Self. We also asked ourselves: Is there anything in our own culture that could help us in our quest for enlightenment? Let's look at the lyrics in the Beatles' music; let's listen to what Van Morrison is singing about; let's be inspired by the fusion of Eastern and Western influences in the music of John Coltrane and Bill Laswell. What about the essential, idealist nature of the United States? Freedom, liberation through unity in diversity—that's what the Founding Fathers were all about. Teaching yoga based on ancient Indian scriptures to New Yorkers began to seem not only possible, but exciting.

Purusha [pure spirit] without Prakriti [nature] is lame, Prakriti without Purusha is blind.

—*Ishvarakrishna, Samkhyakarika*¹

We had both been drawn to the East Village by our artistic pursuits. Along the way, we had inadvertently crossed paths with each other and with some of our greatest future influences.

In the late 1970s, a Seattle radio station broadcast a serial drama produced by Meatbatter Fulton called *The Fourth Tower of Inverness*, which used recordings of Bhagavan Das singing Sanskrit names for God. This singing captivated Sharon, who was at that time a busy dancer and musician with a strong interest in Indian philosophy. She had a feeling that she would meet Bhagavan Das some day.

David, meanwhile, was traveling around the country with his portfolio of drawings, trying to sell on cities. As his old Chevy Suburban slid into Seattle he caught the last few minutes of *The Fourth Tower of Inverness*. Seattle didn't grab him, so he headed toward San Francisco. San Francisco, L.A., Palm Springs, Portland, Houston, Austin, New Orleans ... eventually David limped back to Michigan with a broken trailer filled with soapstone and serpentine rock. A friend invited him to New York City. It didn't take long for him to see that it was the city he had been searching for.

David moved into a dilapidated storefront on 10th Street and Avenue B. The neighborhood's cheap rents were a by-product of rampant drug dealing. To cover holes in his walls, David wheat-pasted covers from old *Life* magazines over them. He opened the Life Café in 1980.

Back in Seattle, Sharon was dancing, reading poetry, and playing violin and singing for the band Audio Letter. At a sound check she slipped and fell hard on her lower spine. By the time the band left to perform at Life Café in New York, Sharon was in terrible pain.

A New York gig meant a lot, though, and the Life Café audience seemed to really enjoy the show. Afterward, Sharon sat near the piano with a cup of tea. She grimaced as pain shot through her back. Tara, a waitress, noticed and was concerned, so Sharon explained that she had fallen months before and was still in pain. Tara, who also taught a yoga class, said that maybe yoga could help. Sharon had always been curious about yoga; she had studied classic Indian dance and philosophy while earning her dance degree from the University of Washington.

David, meanwhile, was pleasantly surprised by Audio Letter. Sharon's lyrics, some in Sanskrit, were like mystical riddles: "Freedom is a psychokinetic skill." When Sharon and the

guitar player, Sue Ann Harkey, moved to New York, David began playing with Audio Letter too.

Soon neighborhood jazz musicians such as drummer Denis Charles and trumpeter Doc Cherry began showing up to jam at Sharon and Sue Ann's apartment on East 7th Street. Charles and Cherry played on Audio Letter's 1988 album, *It Is This, It Is Not This*.

Sharon was still in a lot of pain though. When she went to a doctor, he diagnosed a broken vertebra and recommended surgery to fuse it. Tara gently urged Sharon to try yoga, explaining that yoga had helped her regain mobility after she had broken her pelvis in a car accident. Sharon was afraid at first, because the yoga postures were painful for her, but she trusted Tara, who was a very sensitive teacher.

Yoga's mysticism intrigued David, too, and, at thirty-four, he wanted to stave off the aches and pains of growing older. As he investigated yoga he realized that it was a physically challenging, deeply mystical practice with an intellectually advanced philosophical base.

Sharon and David tried different yoga teachers in New York but were frustrated with their focus on physical exercise and the exclusion of the spiritual and philosophical aspects of yoga. Meanwhile, they had begun incorporating asana, pranayama, and yogic teachings into dance and musical performances, which they performed everywhere, from vacant lots in the East Village to downtown clubs. They actually began teaching the audience Sanskrit chants and simple asanas.



David and Sharon performing, New York City, 1985.

Photographer: Sue Ann Harkey

Knowing that Sharon and David practiced yoga, friends in the audience began asking them to teach. Sharon and David brought the same elements from their performances into the yoga classes they began teaching: music, Sanskrit, yogic scriptures, and an open desire to connect.

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