

MARK DIVINE

U.S. NAVY SEAL AND FOUNDER OF SEALFIT

WITH CATHERINE DIVINE

KOKORO YOGGA

A shirtless man in black pants is performing a lunge yoga pose, with his right leg forward and left leg back, both feet flat on the ground. His right arm is extended upwards, with his hand resting on the top of the letter 'O' in the word 'YOGGA'. The letter 'O' is stylized to resemble a kettlebell and contains a red hammer and sickle symbol. The background is a plain, light gray.

**MAXIMIZE YOUR
HUMAN POTENTIAL
AND DEVELOP THE
SPIRIT OF A WARRIOR**

★
NEW YORK TIMES
BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
**8 WEEKS
TO SEALFIT**



FOREWORD BY GARY KRAFTSOW, FOUNDER OF VINIYOGA

Kokoro yoga

MARK DIVINE

CDR, U.S. Navy SEAL

and CATHERINE DIVINE

Foreword by Gary Kraftsow



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**MAXIMIZE YOUR HUMAN POTENTIAL
AND DEVELOP
THE SPIRIT OF
A WARRIOR**

Yoga is growing in popularity worldwide at an unprecedented rate. The great majority of enthusiasts and practitioners, however, primarily see yoga as a system of exercise oriented toward development of the physical body through the performance of postures known as asana.

To a lesser extent, but increasing steadily, is the emergence of the field of “yoga therapy” as a system of self-care. Perhaps one of the most significant roles of yoga therapy in the context of modern health care is helping with the paradigm shift from illness-based and health practitioner-based care to wellness-based and self-based care.

The scope of yoga therapy extends from:

- **A form of adapted movement therapy to manage structural conditions to**
- **A method of sympathetic/parasympathetic regulation via specialized breathing practices to help manage common symptoms of chronic illness such as stress, sleeplessness, fatigue, and pain management to**
- **A system of mental health care via an integrated use of breathing practices, self-inquiry, and meditation to help balance emotions, clarify thoughts, and support behavioral change.**

Modern scientific and medical research is demonstrating the incredible health benefits of these practices for anatomy, physiology, and the brain. Beyond these more physical benefits, the deeper work of yoga helps us surface our unconscious patterns, gain control over our desires, feelings, thoughts, and behavior. Through these practices we can deepen our self-understanding and gain mastery over our bodies and minds. With that as a foundation, we can access the higher states of awareness that lead to deep wisdom and compassion, and enable us to tap into and actualize our highest potential.

Mark Divine speaks from this deeper and more integrated understanding of yoga in Kokoro Yoga. While yoga therapy can function as a kind of life raft, helping those lost in the ocean of suffering, Kokoro Yoga is a kind of a launchpad for those who want to blast off into the unexplored regions of their own potential.

Sharing his own personal journey from would-be Wall Street professional, to martial artist, to Navy SEAL, to creator of SEALFIT, Mark clearly illustrates the power of the integrated approach to self-development passed on by the ancients.

As a starting point, Mark shares with us his self-reflections that “his career path was incongruent with his ideals.” This insight initiated his journey of self-discovery and self-development. From martial arts training to Navy SEAL training, he continues to listen to his inner voice. “Though trained to kill,” he shares, his heart led him to “discover the path of the peaceful warrior.”

Mark lays out the foundation of this path throughout his book, linking his own insight and

understanding to ancient yogic teachings drawn from key texts such as the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, and the *Taittiriya Upanishad*. He explains the importance and necessity of building an ethical foundation as the root of self-development. He systematically walks us through the component parts of integrated self-development, including training the body, the breath, and the mind. He emphasizes key characteristics of the successful warrior, including the ability to stay “calm, energized, in control of one’s emotions, focused, ready for the mission, and able to manage the stress” that arises in any situation.

Mark reflects on his own experience as he gets older, and the importance of continual rebalancing his training to avoid injuries and burnout. Through his ongoing reflective self-awareness as he trains, he realizes what the ancients said: Our practice must change and evolve to reflect our own stage in life.

Early in the book, Mark speaks of a saying among the SEALs, “Take care of your gear, and it will take care of you.” Similarly, the ancient yogis used to say, “Take care of dharma, and dharma will take care of you.” As I read through Mark’s book, it became clear that he has truly realized this ideal. Mark’s personal journey on the path of Kokoro Yoga, working multidimensionally to optimize his potential at every level—physical, mental, emotional, intuitive, and spiritual—led to his discovery of his own *svadharma* and self-definition as “world-centric warrior and servant of humanity.” A true yogi, Mark has realized through his own efforts that the purpose of human development leading to self-mastery is altruistic; that we then are able to serve others better!

This book explains clearly what self-development means at each level. It offers clear training instructions and tactics that will guide those committed to an ongoing path of self-development and personal growth. More than anything else, this book is a manual for self-empowerment, sharing in contemporary language an ancient path that enables each individual to actualize his or her potential and live life with meaning and purpose.

—Gary Kraftsow

Author of *Yoga for Wellness* and *Yoga for Transformation*

December 2015

Oakland, California

CHAPTER 1

AN M4 AND A YOGA MAT

My path to a complete warrior art

In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are very few.

—SHUNRYU SUZUKI

INTO THE BREACH

IN 1991 I WAS A NAVY OFFICER, RECENTLY GRADUATED FROM SEAL TRAINING (BUD/AS) AS THE HONOR MAN IN MY CLASS, EARNING THE COVETED NAVY SEAL TRIDENT. SOON I WAS ASSIGNED TO SEAL TEAM 3, TASKED TO GO TO IRAQ TO FIGHT IN OPERATION DESERT STORM. FORTUNATELY FOR MANY, THAT WAR ENDED BEFORE WE DEPLOYED and at SEAL Team 3 I would complete 6 more years of active duty in a relatively peaceful period of our history. Although I would visit the Middle East a number of times from 1991 to 1997, I wouldn't get the call to go to another turbulent Iraq until 2004, when I was serving as a reserve officer.

Like most in the reserves during that time, it wasn't a surprise for me to get mobilized for duty during what was being called the war on terror. I knew it was coming but was not sure when.

At 41, my days as a gun-slinging operator were behind me. It didn't make sense for me to go back to a shooting SEAL task unit. So it was cool that my mission would be to lead a fairly complicated study for the U.S. Navy, involving the integration of the U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) into the special ops community (also known as SOCOM). I was to shadow a detachment of 100 handpicked U.S. Marines, intelligence and recon guys called SOCOM Detachment 1 who were to conduct a proof-of-concept deployment under the watchful eye of SEAL Team 1.

It was a big deal. Twenty years earlier, the Marines had declined to be a part of the joint program to form the Special Operations Command, which included the Navy's SEAL teams, the Army's special forces and a Ranger battalion, and the Air Force's special ops teams such as Pararescue. But after 9/11, as the Marine Corps watched particularly hot missions—and the money to support them—flow to SOCOM, they started to rethink their position. The

secretary of defense, Donald Rumsfeld, put the brakes on an effort to fast-track the process. He didn't want to mess around with the 20 years of intricate and complicated coordination work that had already happened between the initial units of SOCOM. A thorough study and evaluation was deemed important to make sure that they didn't screw up what had taken years to get to work well. Though the USMC was ready to throw the 100-man team into combat, validation was a good idea before sending a newly formed concept team from conventional-minded military service into the murky SOF (Special Operations Forces) world. And as you might imagine, there were a lot of charged convictions and emotions when it came to who was taking orders from whom between the SEALs and Marines. The call I got for the job was from Commander Mike Lumpkin, who was then the Naval Special Warfare Group 1 operations officer and had just rolled out of the position as deputy commander of Special Operations Forces, overseeing the 2,000 special operators in Baghdad. (In 2013, Mike Lumpkin became the assistant secretary of defense for SOLIC.)

Prior to deployment to the combat zone with SEAL Team 1, I would lead the organization of the predeployment training certification for SEAL Team 1 with the 100 U.S. Marines from SOCOM Det 1 in tow. This was a good project for me. For one thing, I was intrigued with the underlying matrix of leadership that would need to be worked out between the SEALs and the Marines. Since my years on SEAL Team 3, I had expanded my views and beliefs regarding the definition of a "warrior," leaving behind most parochial and tribal viewpoints on who is the best branch of the military, or who is the best special operator. Even though I was a SEAL through and through, I would be able to offer an impartial viewpoint in conducting the exercise and ensuing study. My job was made easy by the fact that the Marines were great guys and solid operators.

The certification exercise was a big success, and the time finally came for me to deploy to Baghdad to continue part two of my job, the study of the Marine team in SOF combat. Things happened fast. I paid a visit to the supply depot in Coronado, California, to get my weapons and gear, said good-bye to my family, and before I knew it I was on a flight to Bahrain—with a bunch of polished new gear and an M4 rifle that I hadn't had time to take to the range. As an active-duty SEAL, shooting "my" weapon seemed to be a constant. I got real intimate with my primary and secondary weapons. But in the reserves we did not get issued our own weapons, so I literally had to check one out of the armory before I left. Any military member will understand how important it is to sight in your weapon and get comfortable with its idiosyncrasies. In addition, the life of the active-duty SEAL involves around-the-clock training and sharpening skills as an individual and as part of a team. It is a day-in, day-out, year-round affair. As an officer in the SEAL reserves, however, we didn't get to shoot nearly as much, nor did we get issued our own weapon to sleep with.

That was a big concern of mine, along with the web gear I was to use. I had brand-new web gear that wasn't broken in and customized to fit my frame. I needed to "run and gun" with the gear to ensure I would know where the ammo pouches would be in a pinch, and to make sure they wouldn't fly off in a firefight. On active duty, I got really comfortable with my equipment and knew I could rely on it. We had a saying: "Take care of your gear, and it will take care of you!" But here I was, about to deploy into a war zone, and I was looking at a bunch of plastic bags encasing brand-new, untouched equipment and a weapon I hadn't even shot yet. My pucker factor—military jargon for adrenaline—was rising.

Ratcheting up the stress was the news coming out of Iraq. On March 31, 2004, a friend of mine, Stephen "Scott" Helvenston, was one of four Blackwater military contractors that were in a convoy ambushed by insurgents in Fallujah. Scott and the others were killed in a horrifying manner, made worse for me by the fact that I saw him the day before he deployed weeks earlier. This was to be his last deployment with Blackwater. The graphic images startled me, knowing that I would soon be stepping into that same area where I could easily be the next target.

To make matters even worse, in mid-May, days before my deployment, a militant group posted a video of the decapitation of Nick Berg, an American radio-tower repairman from Pennsylvania. The video, which I immediately regretted watching, made me sick to my stomach. The stark reminder that we were fighting an enemy who seemed nuts, believing they were in the right to perform such deranged and hideous acts, steeled me as I stepped onto the C-130.

On my way to Baghdad, I stopped in Bahrain for a couple of days while awaiting final transport to the war zone. There I met up with a civilian analyst, from the Center for Naval Analysis, assigned to write the USMC side of the same report I was working on. He was to go to the Green Zone (the so-called secure area in Baghdad that the American military worked with me. We discussed the project and our approaches as we waited for our ride.

The C-130 was scheduled to depart at 0500 hours. As I waited for the analyst to share his ride to the airfield, he approached me and said, "Mark, I won't be going. I have a bad feeling about this." Great, I thought, ... Wonder if he knows something I don't!

Well, I was going anyhow. I couldn't lose face with my teammates and I was a tough SEAL officer, right? Climbing aboard the turboprop transport workhorse, the C-130, which the U.S. military uses to transport troops and equipment, I was never more nervous in my life. Keenly aware that anything could happen I felt on high alert. As the windowless C-130 roared into the air, I considered how things were stacking up. My civilian counterpart may have been spooked by another story in the press of how an Australian soldier had caught a bullet through his ass while on an aircraft leaving Baghdad. It was just someone shooting from the ground. A bullet had ripped through the fuselage and killed him. The ominous signs were getting the best of me.

Sitting across from me was a one-star Marine general working feverishly on a presentation with an aide. It was a 2-hour flight. After we lifted off, I couldn't bear sitting so I looked around the plane and spotted an open space by some cargo netting in the ramp area. My thoughts were set to full speed and I needed to do something to calm down. Remembering how calm I felt after my yoga sessions back home, I went to the open space near a stack of pallets and started doing a deep-breathing exercise and a few forward folds and backbends. This led to a full-blown yoga session in the middle of the bumpy ride in the C-130. (Later in my reserve career, I made it a point to practice yoga on military transports whenever I could. Often I had other members of my SEAL team or other military passengers join me, but I am pretty sure this was a first in military history!) The one-star Marine general must have been thinking: That SEAL officer is obviously green to combat and scared shitless. I didn't care. The yoga began to calm my mind and helped me regain control of my emotions. I felt much better as we turned our nose toward the Iraqi desert.

By the time we landed in Baghdad, I wasn't in a perfect Zen state by any means—we were

in a combat zone after all—but I was far more calm, present, and centered, and ready for what came next.

That was a good thing. I hadn't been on the ground more than 15 minutes when I heard someone shout, "Incoming!" followed by the unmistakable whistle of a mortar flying toward us. I had only heard mortars while in training, not combat, and in training they are whistling away from you. Trust me when I say it sounds very different when it is coming full bore at you! It exploded about a quarter mile away. Okay, I said to myself. Welcome to combat.

Later, a couple of SEAL team guys drove up to retrieve me—loaded for bear for the 40-minute ride through bad-guy land—they gave me a sign to lock and load my M4 (I didn't have the guts to tell them I hadn't even sighted it in yet) and off we went to the SEAL compound at one of Saddam Hussein's former palace grounds.

That yoga session on the C-130 was my first official session of what I called Warrior Yoga (I later changed the name to Kokoro Yoga to avoid a trademark infringement). I realized at that moment that yoga presented a powerful toolkit for my own warrior development.

YOGA: THE BEGINNING OF MY JOURNEY

So there I was, breathing slowly and deeply into a Sun Salutation in the cargo area of a C-130 on my way to a combat zone. I was too focused on the moment to ask the obvious question: How did I get here?

As random and seemingly out of place my initial session of Kokoro Yoga might sound, it was a significant point of arrival in a long and steady search I had been conducting both during my active-duty time with the SEALs and after.

The search was in some ways a circular one, trying to reconnect with the kind of integrated warrior training that had initially infused me with the awareness and courage to let go of my big-money CPA career I had taken shape on Wall Street for the rigorous challenge of becoming and being a Navy SEAL. It started with what had been a growing sense of inner doubt about what I was setting out to do with my life, a voice I largely ignored as I began to climb the corporate ladder. I was in it for the money, in other words. The prospects for my success were bright. One of the chief rewards came from my family who appreciated that I was conforming to an ideal they had for me. Although I wasn't acknowledging it at the time, my career was incongruent with my ideal. There was a growing weight on my shoulders and my future in high finance stretched out before me. I was walking home one night from work when my train of thought was disrupted by a series of shouts coming from a second-floor window of a seven-story building on West 23rd Street. Intrigued, I walked up a flight of stairs and into what would become a truly disruptive force in my life: the Seido Karate dojo run by Grandmaster Tadashi Nakamura.

Nakamura had formerly been deployed to the United States from Japan to lead a style of karate known for tournament fighting, Kyokushinkai. Nakamura had become disenchanted with the lack of dimension in the training and left despite intense pressure from Japan. Nakamura went about creating Seido Karate with the intent of focusing on human development rather than sheer fighting prowess. The word *seido* is Japanese for "since that way." This was my first exposure to the martial arts, and I soon found that Seido was a practice that truly integrated body, mind, and spirit training. Unlike other martial arts

would become acquainted with over the years, Seido was unique in that it didn't just talk about the mental and spiritual aspects—it was actually part of the training. Meditation and spiritual talks and discussions on mental development were part of the routine, along with the fighting practice. It was through this work that I was able to connect with the sincere voice within my being and understand that I was meant for something different than taking place in the family business, as was expected.

Seido not only unlatched access to an inner wisdom that led me to join the Navy and become a SEAL, it also prepared me in a foundational way for what is considered the most arduous and demanding military training program in the world.

The five guiding principles of Seido Karate training are as follows:

- 1. ETHICAL FOUNDATION.** The ethical foundation of Seido is based upon what's called "bushido," also known as the Way of the Warrior, a series of moral standards embraced by samurai warriors, like honor, frugality, and loyalty. As you read the next chapter in this book, you'll note that the first two levels of yoga, or limbs, are also staked in an ethical foundation.
- 2 INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT.** As mentioned, Seido didn't just pay lip service to the concept of integrating mental and spiritual training into the daily practice, Nakamura emphasized this fusion: "My purpose in founding Seido Karate was to show what I feel is the true essence, the kernel of true karate: the training of body, mind, and spirit together in order to realize the fullness of human potential."
- 3 SPIRITUAL AWARENESS.** Zen meditation is core to the Seido practice. As esoteric as this may sound, the meditation and spiritual lectures helped me develop the awareness and humility to thrive through the ego-busting stress of BUD/S and Hell Week.
- 4 CRUCIBLE TRAINING.** Frequent tests and challenges are part of the Seido program and work to help push students to new levels of performance and to comprehend the magnitude of the potential lying within. For example, an annual crucible session at the dojo might include thousands of kicks and punches. Another common crucible session was conducted over the course of days at a monastery, where we would fill our days endlessly cycling back and forth from meditation to karate work.
- 5 FORGING MENTAL TOUGHNESS.** In Seido, we were worked hard and steadily toward developing resiliency and a mentally tough attitude where we never backed down. As Nakamura explained: "Seido seeks to develop in each student a 'non-quitting' spirit. No matter what the obstacle or difficulty—emotional, physical, financial—we want students to feel that, though there may be setbacks, they will never be overcome by any of these problems."

The unified training of Seido proved to be invaluable the day I stepped onto the path to become a Navy SEAL. Because of the relentless difficulty of BUD/S, of having to go 100 miles for the better part of a year, from Hell Week to drownproofing to SEAL Qualification

Training, I survived the staggeringly high failure rate. Actually it was because of the integrated warrior training, which I took so seriously, that I did more than just survive. I was able to thrive, finishing as honor man, # 1 graduate, of my class.

SEARCH FOR A COMPLETE WARRIOR ART

In joining the Navy SEALs, I was leaving Wall Street behind—a good thing for me. A sacrifice, however, was leaving behind my training at the Seido World Headquarters on West 23rd Street in Manhattan. In departing for the SEALs, I took with me a desire to find another practice that had a similar comprehensive approach to human development that Seido did. Being on a SEAL team was all that I had imagined, of course. But as an operator you get very focused, for obvious reasons, on shooting, fighting, and mission success. You won't find time dedicated to a spiritual practice on the schedule. So my search for something similar to Seido put me on a quest.

SCARS (Special Combat Aggressive Reactionary System) was my first stop. SCARS was developed by a Vietnam vet named Jerry Peterson from a lethal hand-to-hand combat system called Kung Fu San Soo. Peterson had stripped away all of the cultural elements into what you might call a clear science of how to offensively fight to win. The training was brutal—a 30-day, 10-hour-day program to become certified to teach SCARS. I loved the techniques and the training was fun, but whereas Seido was about developing moral character and spirit, SCARS was about fighting and surviving. In fact, SCARS training came with a warning: Do not use unless someone must die. In the end, I had more than 1,000 hours of training in SCARS when I left the active-duty SEAL teams. In a story that illuminates why I was motivated to continue my search for another Seido-like program, my wife, Sandy, had become a therapist for the Navy. One assignment sent her to a U.S. Navy vessel in Australia that would soon be returning home. Her job was to help the sailors prepare for the jarring realities of returning to civilian life after months at sea. At a dinner in the officers' cabin, the commander of the ship was asking about Sandy's background, and it came up that she was married to someone also in the Navy.

"Who are you married to?" she was asked.

"Lieutenant Commander Mark Divine," Sandy answered.

One of the junior officers went off: "Mark Divine! Mark Divine. I know him ... he's a SEAL and SCARS master. He could kill us all with his pinky finger!"

After I finished laughing when Sandy told me this story, I began to think about it. As much as I didn't want to be known as some sort of CPA to be feared in a corporate audit, I also didn't find it appealing to be known as a master of the science of killing. I knew that humble warriors are the last to pick up a weapon. I was becoming a more peaceful warrior, even as a SEAL officer.

In transitioning from active duty to the SEAL reserve force, I started training in a Goju-Ryu karate dojo, which had similar roots to Seido. I earned my black belt quickly, in part because I already knew most of the physical moves. But there was no meditation or spiritual training and when I was recalled in 1999 back to active duty for a stint in Egypt and the Middle East, I never returned to Goju-Ryu.

After the 1-year tour of duty, Sandy and I adopted our son, Devon, and moved to Nor

County, San Diego, about a 40-minute drive up the coast from the SEAL base in Coronado. My search continued. I began to study with Sensei Shane Phelps, a ninjutsu master. Sensei Phelps was trying to get his ninjutsu studio, Temple of the Full Autumn Moon, off the ground when I started training with him. I helped him write a business plan, in fact. He had one of the most sensational backgrounds you're ever going to find. He fought in the Vietnam War and then went on to serve 7 years as a Navy SEAL. He worked for the United Nations as a peacekeeper in places like Syria and Lebanon, and also as an antiterrorism agent of the CIA. He got his BA at Stanford and went on to earn a masters degree in comparative religion at Harvard and a Master of Divinity at Yale. Before his Western schooling in the Ivy League, however, he spent 2 years studying Tai Chi and meditating at a Buddhist monastery in China. Shane has long been an awesome example of what I call the 20x factor.

To this day I love the art of ninjutsu. It is an incredible combination of some 40 different types of martial arts, with a variety of weapons and both internally (oriented toward the psychological and spiritual) and externally oriented arts (the more physical-leaning of the martial arts). In the negative column, I found the training frustratingly slow-going and fragmented. I was working toward my black belt when Shane's school suddenly ran out of money and closed its doors. He began working with only private clients, and so my search continued for the complete warrior workout.

It was during this phase of my journey when I discovered yoga.

THE WAY OF THE PEACEFUL WARRIOR

Yoga in the West is viewed through a variety of lenses ... for most it is a form of exercise. Pilates, Power Yoga, Core Yoga, and Hot Yoga are good examples of this movement. Others may consider it a mystical practice bound to Hinduism, or as a place to train Cirque du Soleil athletes. Since the late 1990s there has been a boom of yoga studios around the country, giving rise to millions walking to and from group classes with mats jutting out of their backpacks in a quest to stretch, bend, sweat, and look great naked. I was soon to learn that yoga offered much more.

My introduction to yoga came through reading a classic titled *Autobiography of a Yogi*, by Paramahansa Yogananda. I figured anyone with the word "Yoga" in his name must know what he was talking about. Funny thing, the book had nothing to do with stretching and twisting your body into a pretzel. What Yogananda brought to life was a powerful philosophy of living and developing oneself spiritually. I was intrigued, as I had just left ninjutsu and couldn't find another program near my home that inspired me. So the thought that perhaps yoga could fill that void popped into my head after reading the book. The spiritual component was something that I was seeking, even though I was not drawn toward the Hindu mythology glued to the yoga programs I had seen to date. I consider myself a Christian and wondered if there would be a conflict. However, I recalled training at the Zen Mountain Monastery with my karate team back in 1989. The head monk, Daido, said that Buddhism as a philosophy was in complete alignment with Christianity. From what I had read, yoga was similar in that it was not a religion, but a philosophy of living as well and a science of personal development. I thought it could be in complete alignment with any religious conviction. Armed with that theory, my journey into yoga began.

Five years before my deployment to Baghdad I mustered the courage to walk into a Hot Yoga studio in Encinitas, California. In Hot Yoga they crank the temperature up to 100 degrees as you twist and boil your way through 26 poses. The first thing I noticed walking out of the yoga class, dripping wet, was how good I felt. The 90 minutes of standing and seated poses in the sauna-like studio yielded some incredible detoxification and deep stretching benefits.

Not being one to shy from a gut check, I immediately signed up for their challenge of a Hot Yoga class every day for 60 days. The challenge for me was not so much the discipline, but rather that the classes were chock-full of very attractive women bending and twisting in spandex. Not only was it hard to concentrate, but also my preconditioned notion of what men do and what women do for fitness, was put to the test. I had to trust my intuition that this was a worthy pursuit and shift my attention inward to keep focused on the training effect. I found that this inward focus developed greater awareness and deepened my intuition. It was an experience quite different from my years studying martial arts. In fighting and the martial arts, the focus is mostly outward, except when meditating before and after class. In yoga, it is meant to be inward. Rather than scanning the room or my opponent for opportunities and threats, I was attending to my breathing and the nuances of moving into and staying in the pose. I began to notice that if I went into a session with a scattered mind, the practice settled my mind and connected me to a deeper part of my character.

But Hot Yoga was just a launching pad into this amazing new world. Though a fine introduction to yoga, the precise repeating of the same 26 poses each session, in the same sequence, with the instructors uttering the exact same words each class—became mind-numbing to me. I felt a need for variety and silence in my practice, and I could not get there. I soon began to wonder if I needed a studio at all. The movements were familiar enough to me after 15 years of martial arts that I thought I would be able to train on my own.

I found two yoga DVDs to use at home. One was by Baron Baptiste, called *Power Yoga*, emphasizing core strength and balance, and another by Shiva Rea, emphasizing a fluid, dancelike sequence and breathing. I really enjoyed both as they expanded my repertoire and deepened my knowledge. I would rotate them and add an occasional visit to the Hot Yoga studio to get my sweat on. This went on for 2 years before I stumbled into Ashtanga Yoga, which blew my mind open. Discovering Ashtanga Yoga was a turning point in my yoga studies.

I am lucky to live and work in a town that virtually screams health and fitness. Encinitas, California, brims with world-class endurance athletes, and well-known surfers and skateboarders. Guess what else may be found in Encinitas? Some of the most-qualified yoga teachers in the world. In a conversation with a friend I was asked if I trained with Ashtanga Yoga legend Tim Miller. She said the name with such reverence, she might as well have called him “Master Tim Miller.” Tim is the first American to be certified in Ashtanga Yoga by Sri K. Pattabhi Jois. Tim had to train for many years and make several long trips to India, virtually begging Jois for the honor. It was clearly not given out lightly, especially to an American. I found Tim’s studio literally across the street from my office. He was the “real deal,” and he became my next sensei.

Ashtanga Yoga was derived from the teachings of the famed yoga master Krishnamacharya

He taught Sri K. Pattabhi Jois a progressive system of increasingly challenging series of poses in six series in total, designed for young athletes and military groups. It had a rigid structure that the young men were not to deviate from. After all, good order and discipline are required in the training of new warriors. Jois named it Ashtanga, borrowing the term from Patanjali's Yoga Sutras (more on that in chapter 2). I was drawn to the Ashtanga system because it seemed to share a developmental ladder similar to a martial art belt-ranking system. Though you don't test and get promoted in Ashtanga, you do work progressively through the series of poses over the years. I first approached it with my Western goal-oriented mind, thinking I had found my new martial art and that I was going to "get my black belt in Ashtanga."

My first session of Ashtanga kicked my ass and rekindled the warrior flame within me. It took me—an elite athlete, martial artist, and yoga practitioner—1 hour and 45 minutes to get through, and the session was so demanding I almost lost all bodily functions. I've found that true yoga, I thought with elation, as I crawled off the mat. Later, I would attend two 100-hour teacher trainings in the first and second series with Tim. But as the Iraq War heated up in 2004, duty came knocking again and I replaced my yoga attire with the uniform of the Navy SEALs for the third time.

Welcome to Yoga Saddam

In Baghdad, my yoga session aboard the C-130 stayed with me as I settled into life in the combat zone. My work routine mirrored the "battle rhythm" of the Navy SEAL task group where I set up shop. I would awake around 9:00 a.m. and work till 2:00 or 3:00 a.m. Sleep was a luxury few enjoy in combat.

Exercise was another challenge. SEALs will always improvise to find a way to train, even when operating on combat missions that go late into the night. In my situation it was largely impractical to go to the gym, which was located at Camp Victory and required a combat driver in an armored humvee to get to. It was not worth the risk or time. So I began running around the compound, a 3-mile loop, and doing body weight PT (physical training). Soon I felt the itch for yoga, but there were certainly no yoga classes (that I was aware of) being held anywhere in Baghdad, or Iraq. Another nonstarter. So I again decided to follow my intuition and just go it alone based upon what I had learned from Hot Yoga, Power Yoga, and Ashtanga Yoga.

Finding a small patch near one of Saddam Hussein's former palaces, next to a lake, I set up shop. It wasn't as picturesque as this might sound—for starters, the pool and house were blanketed with pockmarks from a firefight—but it had some trees to provide shade in the desert heat and was removed enough that I wouldn't get awkward stares from the other warriors on base. I skipped breakfast every morning and found refuge at my new training spot. Equipped with a mat, my M4 (now sighted in), and a kettlebell, I started playing with different combinations of yoga poses, functional interval workouts, self-defense moves, and breathing and visualization exercises. The visualization was always of me at home with my family after leaving Baghdad (a version of the "future me" visualization I teach in this book). I would listen closely to my body and train from 45 to 90 minutes depending on what my intuition told me I needed. When I was finished with the practice I felt amazingly clear and

calm.

As the weeks progressed this practice became my center post in the storm of combat. One day, CDR Wilson, the commanding officer of SEAL Team 1 stopped by to observe my training. Though he was intrigued, I couldn't get him to join me ... the demands on his time were simply too much for him to make that leap. Or perhaps he thought what I was doing was a little bit odd, and he didn't want to risk his men thinking I had converted him! I could only explain what it felt like, but a new "initiate" must experience the practice for himself to truly understand the vast benefits of yoga. Now, years later, I realize how valuable this practice would be for warriors in the field to manage stress, win in their minds, and avoid the devastating effects of PTSD.

While at the height of the Iraq War, I started each workday feeling calm, energized, in control of my emotions, present, and ready for the mission. My mental facilities were sharp as were my skills in dealing with the stressful environment. These benefits were, in my opinion, a direct result of the daily yoga practice.

Fast-Forward

My experience in Baghdad was profound and propelled me into taking my life in an entirely new direction. When I returned home I amped up my Ashtanga Yoga practice, and launched US CrossFit and the SEALFIT integrated training program. By 2013 I had a worldwide reputation for success in training SEAL and special ops candidates and other elite athletes through SEALFIT and a mental toughness program called Unbeatable Mind. Based on the training program I wrote three books, two of which became bestsellers. A 20,000-square-foot training center in Encinitas, California, became my laboratory. I could be heard saying, "I eat my own dog food," because I endeavored to train for 2 to 3 hours a day doing a combination of SEALFIT and Kokoro Yoga (and still do to this day).

In 2014, I turned 51 and my body was telling me that I needed to rebalance my training. The combination of the hard-hitting SEALFIT program, with hard-core Ashtanga Yoga worked well—until I turned 50! Now, it was leading to small injuries and burnout. I needed to find balance in my personal practice, not just for my own comfort, but also so that I could teach athletes and warriors of all ages, not just the younger set. Though I love the Ashtanga practice and community, the rigidity of the routines and difficulty of the poses made me concerned that I would get seriously injured and sidelined as I got older. The warrior's way is to train every day that you are alive, and I planned to be training until 150—then drop dead on the training floor in Savasana (corpse pose!). Thus as I evolved, I wanted my yoga to work for all stages of life, for differing intentions, and for different types of people. A new approach was in order.

I found my next mentor in Gary Kraftsow, founder of American Viniyoga—also adapted from Krishnamacharya's teaching. (Krishnamacharya taught a third application of yoga to B. K. S. Iyengar, which is popular in the West.) These three systems (Ashtanga, Viniyoga, and Iyengar) all seem very different to the observer, but to Krishnamacharya they were just "yoga" taught for different applications and different phases of life. This made sense to me: the SEALs we used what worked, discarded what didn't, and strove to adapt our training to our situation, environment, and age. I adopted some Viniyoga training methods so that

Kokoro Yoga could be more flexible and balanced.

When asked by my athletes to put my method yoga into a fixed form that could be trained at home or in the field, I was hesitant at first. I always molded it to the audience. And why was I to write a book about yoga in the shadow of such incredible teachers and mentors? But one of my students, a former Marine, asked how his Marines and other military members could train in Kokoro Yoga. He implied that they would be open to try yoga if it came from a warrior like myself, who they trusted to give them practical training to improve their survivability and ability to manage combat-related stress. I received a similar message from my CrossFit “fire-breathing” friend Greg Amundson. He felt that the athletic community needed a yoga that could complement their athleticism through durability, spinal health, and breathing. Finally, I got the blessing from Gary, who felt that this community of warriors desperately needed yoga. I agreed, and this book is my humble attempt to serve.

Whether you are a Navy SEAL running toward the sounds of gunfire or an athlete seeking maximum performance in your sport, a dedicated daily practice of Kokoro Yoga will help you to perform at your peak. If you are suffering from combat (or any shock) related stress, it will allow you to recover your peace of body and mind.

As I found during my time in Baghdad, and have continued to discover to this day, there is incredible value to be absorbed from integrated, full-spectrum training. Do you desire to be more flexible, gain core strength, and be more durable? Yoga will absolutely bring it. Do you want to gain composure under pressure and a calm mind? Yoga will bring it. But that's just the beginning. For the athlete, the military operator, the corporate executive, the artist, the auto mechanic, the firefighter, the student, the homemaker, the parent, I believe Kokoro Yoga is a Trojan horse ready to unleash a host of unforeseen benefits, ultimately leading to the highest levels of consciousness. I know, it sounds too good to be true, but if you stay with me and begin a daily routine that meets your practical needs, body type, and goals, then you will be planting the seeds for a powerful future.

Ultimately, this book is about mastering yourself at all levels so that you can become a warrior you were meant to be. Someone who is willing to say yes to the right mission, and say no to the status quo. Someone who can transcend the various strains of neuroses, which today's media would love to have you feed on, and be “sheepdog strong,” so you can serve and protect others. Someone who accelerates their development to the highest, integrated stage of consciousness—and become a world-centric warrior and servant to all of humanity.

CHAPTER 2

THE PURSUIT OF MAXIMUM HUMAN POTENTIAL

When you are inspired by some great purpose, some extraordinary project, all your thoughts break their bonds. Your mind transcends limitations, your consciousness expands in every direction, and you find yourself in a new, great, and wonderful world. Dormant forces, faculties, and talents become alive, and you discover yourself to be a greater person by far than you ever dreamed yourself to be.

–PATANJALI

OLDEST PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM

Just what is yoga? If you think yoga is a group stretching program, or a fitness program for the ladies, then I suggest a visit to northern India to watch how yoga is practiced by the yoga warriors. There you would see how yoga shares its beginnings with the martial tradition and if you open your mind to fresh understanding of what yoga is, you'll begin to appreciate the depth and breadth of what is the world's oldest and most complete self-development program.

The word *yoga* means “to yoke, to unify, or to integrate.” At the mental level it means to integrate your ego mind with your witnessing mind. (Maybe we can call that your soul?) It also means to integrate your body, mind, and spirit into a whole, as well as to live life in a more integrated, balanced manner with simplicity, spirituality, and nonattachment to material distractions. Ultimately I like to focus on yoga as a means to develop mastery of the self, so we can serve others better. We can do this if we integrate fully, connect to our spiritual selves and advance consciousness to the highest level available to us in our lifetime. The word “Kokoro” means warrior spirit, or to merge heart and mind into your actions. So Kokoro Yoga is a warrior development application of this ancient self-realization system.

It's speculated that yoga was first practiced in the fifth or sixth centuries BCE, but it's more plausible that it is thousands of years old. While yoga in the West is most often associated with fitness, or our reverence for Mahatma Gandhi for his yogic philosophy of nonviolent leadership, or Paramahansa Yogananda, founder of the Self-Realization Fellowship, it has a deep, complicated place in India's warrior history in a way that demonstrates the depth and breadth of yoga as a living philosophy of spirituality and science.

of the mind. As William Pinch detailed in *Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires*, his account of yoga history in India, he wrote: “Crucial to the transition to wide scale military entrepreneurship in the eighteenth century was the ability of the yogi to be many things at once—to be Muslim and Hindu, emperor and mendicant, ascetic and archer, soldier and spy.” Pinch also details the age of India’s military labor market and the role yogi warriors or “armed ascetics” had in India’s history from 1500 to the present.

Consider the following description of the broad, open-source code nature of yoga by Sukeer Mehta, a professor at New York University, who wanted to emphasize how yoga’s dimensionality goes beyond fitness or preparing for a fight:

The yoga that most Americans are aware of is Hatha Yoga, only one of the various types of yoga. Krishna in the Bhagavad-Gita defines the others: Raja, Karma, Bhakti, and Jnana yoga. Yoga is diverse and profound—volunteering at a soup kitchen is yoga; raising your voice in praise in a gospel choir is yoga; trying to understand how the galaxies shift and why the poor lack shoes is also yoga.

The above quote clearly points to yoga being far more than a series of physical movements designed to get you fit and looking good. Jnana Yoga is the yoga of the intellect. Through deep study of scripture, gaining knowledge and wisdom and understanding the working of one’s own mind, enlightenment is attained. This is the path many intellectuals in modern religious traditions take. Bhakti Yoga is the path of utter devotion and love for God in a way meaningful to the seeker. This is the path that suits anyone who prefers an “I-Thou” relationship with God. Karma Yoga is the path of action. Through one’s dedication to duty and service through action, karma is purified and spiritual evolution occurs. Hatha Yoga is the physical training system for personal mastery that, as Mehta points out, most modern offerings are based upon. In its purest form, Raja Yoga includes Hatha and the study of the eight levels of training described in Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras (more on that soon). Where do our yoga fit in this mix?

Kokoro Yoga is designed for anyone who wishes to tap into his or her warrior archetype: those who are driven toward action, passionate about service, and committed to continuous personal growth. It is Raja Yoga that combines Karma Yoga (the yoga of action) with Hatha Yoga (the yoga of personal mastery). We seek to train all of the eight stages of development for self-mastery. As mentioned, these Eight Limbs were defined by Patanjali in the BCE era. Early in my training it was that work that opened my mind to yoga being more than a fitness regimen. I experienced its power as an integrated development system, similar in some ways to what I had experienced with Seido Karate.

THE EIGHT LIMBS

It is said that if you know your enemies and know yourself, you will not be imperiled in a hundred battles; if you do not know your enemies but do know yourself, you will win one and lose one; if you do not know your enemies nor yourself, you will be imperiled in every single battle.—SUN TZU

The Yoga Sutras are a collection of 196 aphorisms (in Sanskrit known as sutras—a thread of specific principles described in terse, cogent pieces of writing). The bulk of the sutras deal with the science of mental development. Yet Patanjali also describes eight levels of the yoga path. They are like rungs on a ladder. The eight levels are to be progressed in a “transcend and include” manner toward a complete integration. This means that each level transcends the level preceding it, but doesn’t leave the training and benefits behind. They are included in the upward spiral of development. In sum we are working toward the highest level of integration, which we will call self-mastery. Self-mastery means developing each and every level into a unified whole, so we can experience life at its fullest. Here is a brief description of the Eight Limbs:

LEVEL 1: YAMA. ETHICAL DISCIPLINES. Yama is a code of morality and character to study, align with, and ultimately live by. It can be viewed as a set of ethical disciplines to guide our interactions with other humans. We will discuss some of these disciplines later in the book, and they include a code of restraint, or balance; a code of nonviolence; a code of truthfulness and honesty; a code of nonstealing; a code of noncoveting—meaning the elimination of greed and developing contentment with few possessions and nonindulgence.

LEVEL 2: NIYAMA. PERSONAL DISCIPLINES. These are individual disciplines taken on to set the foundation for mastery of your body and mind, leading to purity and contentment. They include: detoxifying the body and the mind; a deep introspection and healthy use of mental capacities; also, a dedication to a spiritual practice (this can be attending your church, for example). For me, my spiritual practice is yoga and meditation.

LEVEL 3. ASANA. FUNCTIONAL MOVEMENT. This level is what most Westerners think of when they think of yoga. The true purpose of this rung is to prepare the student’s body so that he or she can sit in concentration and meditation for long periods of time. For our purposes, this is the movement branch of Kokoro Yoga. It includes the customary poses seen in many yoga studios, and also some functional movements from my SEALFIT program, or CrossFit and even the martial arts.

LEVEL 4. PRANAYAMA. BREATH CONTROL. The fourth level is dedicated to the regulation of breath and harnessing the natural energy all around us. This level is where we begin to transcend from knowing yoga as a physical and ethical practice to experiencing a profound spiritual evolution. Working with the breath is free medicine, bringing optimal health and even great power. Yoga works with prana, or “life force,” through the breath. It is identical in this way to practices like Tai Chi (chi meaning “life energy”) and Qigong (“life energy cultivation”). Through breath control practices like our box breathing drills, the energy centers of the body are tapped into, linked, and energized through the conscious movement and control of the breath.

LEVEL 5. PRATYAHARA. MASTERY OF THE SENSES. From the extrasensory capacities

developed by the deaf and blind, we know that by shutting off one sense, other senses will expand in extraordinary ways to compensate. Thus through level five we seek to train and regulate our senses. By mastering the senses, we can better control those random urges—think about what propels greed and overeating and stuffing our garage with crap we don't really need. By shutting off the senses we can sharpen our capacity to listen to the sixth sense, intuition.

LEVEL 6. DHARANA. CONCENTRATION. This level is about developing deep powers of concentration. We sharpen our mind and develop single-point focus. In practice, this is about brushing away the noise of the unruly mind by strengthening our capacity to lock on to one thing and block out the rest. Martial artists work binding their thoughts, with laserlike focus, to movements. In Kokoro Yoga we will concentrate on the poses, the breath, and an object.

LEVEL 7. DHYANA. MEDITATION. Dhyana is about developing presence. Whereas concentration is a coherent, singular focus, a state of meditation is the absence of thought—settling your witnessing, perceiving mind on the object or subject of your choosing until there is a transfer of information. It is letting go of active thought and being in complete presence. It is at this level of yoga where deep levels of consciousness and awareness are obtained and further trained. In sports, this meditative state is known as flow, or the zone of peak performance, where time stands still and a flow state ensues.

LEVEL 8. SAMADHI. UNION, INTEGRATION. This is considered to be the level of spiritual enlightenment, of the union of true self with the ego self. My friend Ken Wilber, creator of the Integral Theory and author of *The Theory of Everything*, explains that when integrated (“enlightened” in Eastern terminology) you will tether with your “soul self” which then becomes the center of your consciousness versus your limited ego-thinking self. When this happens we end separation and are able to express ourselves most authentically to the world, able to take perspectives on our own perspectives as well as those of others, and can experience life as a blissful connection with all sentient beings.

[STORICAL INFLUENCES

Now that you have a sense of the depth and breadth of yoga, let's get a grasp of the historical roots. However, considering the hundreds or thousands of years that yoga has existed, definitive history of yoga is beyond the capacity of this book. What I do wish to impart is that yoga has had many expressions and can be considered an open-source project taken on by warriors, athletes, and spiritual aspirants over many eons. The project continues today with millions of Western practitioners adopting its methods and philosophy.

juna: A Warrior at a Crossroads

The mind is restless, turbulent, strong and unyielding ... as difficult to subdue as the wind. For the uncontrolled there is no wisdom. Nor for the uncontrolled is there power of concentration. And for him without concentration there is no peace. And for the unpeaceful how can there be happiness—ADAPTED FROM THE BHAGAVAD GITA (KRISHNA SPEAKING TO ARJUNA)

A text that routinely appears in comparative religion classes throughout the Western world is the *Bhagavad Gita*. The Hindu epic, composed circa the seventh century BCE, presented the many faces of yoga and how they appeal to certain characters such as the warrior Arjuna. The central theme is the importance of performing one's simple, daily work and duties with focus and critical and spiritual binding with renunciation—of not being attached to material reward. The *Gita* is a warrior's manual that encourages the reader to actively confront and take on evil in the world rather than turning the other cheek.

At the heart of the *Gita* is a dialogue between Arjuna, a master archer warrior, and Krishna, an earthly manifestation of the Indian deity Vishnu, representing the voice of God. A major battle is about to erupt between Arjuna's tribe and his cousin's tribe. Arjuna is confronted with the fact that his mission requires fighting against members of his family—the sort of inner conflict that Americans recall from their history of the Civil War. Arjuna's skill with the bow and arrow is so exceptional that he can pierce the eye of a bird in flight, but in the *Gita* he struggles with questions of morality, ethics, and his duty as a warrior, seeking answers from Krishna. Arjuna ultimately chooses not to fight, sacrificing his life rather than betray his thoughts and feelings for his family. The dialogue with Krishna finally offers a path to spiritual freedom that is not total renunciation of the fruits of one's labor nor abstinence from performing one's work—rather, spiritual perfection is pursued by performing one's duty in life without looking for rewards and with detachment to the results. Arjuna's sacrifice informs the inner struggle of warriors of all races and generations, including the modern warrior who strives to do the right thing in spite of the consequences.

Bodhidharma and Kalaripayattu

In surveying the expansion of yoga from the ancient East to the modern West, we should also look at the shared roots yoga has with the martial arts. The legend of Bodhidharma, a son of an Indian King in the sixth century, sheds light on both of these topics. Bodhidharma traveled by foot and boat from his homeland, where he eventually arrived at the Shaolin Monastery in the Henan Province of China, the famous Buddhist temple known for the development of Kung Fu. Martial arts history holds that after Bodhidharma arrived at the temple, he spent years in seated meditation, inspiring the monks with both his fierce discipline and deep spiritual powers. Bodhidharma began to teach the monks the practice of what would be known as Zen meditation, but the monks were academics and didn't have the physical capacities to perform extended meditation.

Bodhidharma created what you might call a health and fitness program to complement the meditation practice, a series of 18 flowing yoga postures very similar to Hatha Yoga. These movements also shared properties of the Indian martial art known as Kalaripayattu—which is considered by some to be the oldest fighting art in human history. Bodhidharma has been

credited by some for the creation of Shaolin Boxing and his contribution to Zen Buddhism. There is ample evidence that the Chinese had developed martial systems far before Bodhidharma arrived, but the key point I'd like to make is that through this form of educational dissemination, the ancient practice of yoga was transmitted across borders and eventually throughout the world.

Yoga and Gymnastics

In sorting out the modern offerings of yoga in the West, it can be helpful to reverse engineer the influences and reinterpretations involved. One of the more interesting discussions sparked by author Mark Singleton, suggests that there was a blending of West into East as modern yoga evolved. Singleton's book, *Yoga Body*, pins some of his research on a fitness trend that occurred in Europe in the nineteenth century. It was then that the Scandinavian system of gymnastics became popular throughout Europe in the 1800s. Called "primitive gymnastics"—and showing up in the YMCA network of gymnasiums—it was a bodyweight exercise regimen, attractive to civilians for the health benefits and attractive to the fighting forces for the fitness edge it could provide. The poses used within the Danish system are vividly similar to the poses you'd find in an introduction to yoga class.

Following is an interesting assessment by writer Matthew Lee Anderson on the *Yoga Body*:

Mark Singleton analyzed Niels Bukh's *Primary Gymnastics* (1925) and found that "at least 28 of the exercises in the first edition of Bukh's manual are strikingly similar (often identical) to yoga postures occurring in Pattabhi Jois' Ashtanga sequence or in Iyengar's *Light on Yoga*. Both Jois and Iyengar were students of T. Krishnamacharya, who taught yoga in the Indian royal palace and whose classes were categorized as "physical culture" or "exercise" in the official palace records. By that point, the Danish gymnastic system had reached such a level of popularity that it had been incorporated into the British Army and into the Indian YMCA.

Yoga Comes to American Shores

The European explosion of yoga and gymnastics for exercise was a precursor to several key yoga voices crossing the pond to introduce Americans to the mysteries of yoga. One of the most influential was Paramahansa Yogananda, from Uttar Pradesh, India, who came to the United States in 1920. Through Yogananda's establishment of the Self-Realization Fellowship and his book, *Autobiography of a Yogi* (incidentally this is the only book Steve Jobs kept on his personal iPad), he introduced the philosophy of yoga, and meditation to millions. Other teachers that have had a big impact on the popularity of yoga in the United States include M. Scott Peck, Universe winner Walt Baptiste, followed by his son Baron. Baron has more recently popularized Power Yoga, a variant of Ashtanga Vinyasa (flowing) Yoga. With Power Yoga he weaves mind-and-body empowerment practice including meditation and "active self-enquiry." Baron became a performance coach for the Philadelphia Eagles, an early pioneer in applying yoga methods for sports performance.

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