

INTRODUCTION TO
LIVING YOGA

As shared at the Yoga Sanctuary



STEVE HARRISON

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This handbook is intended to provide a simple guide to the underlying principles of Living Yoga for those new to the practice, or wishing to reconnect with it. It offers supporting inspiration for the foundational practices and is designed to accompany the introduction videos available on the On Demand library as you establish your personal practice.

We hope you find it a useful companion as you begin to explore Living Yoga.

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WHAT IS LIVING YOGA?

AN INTRODUCTION

Yoga has been widely misunderstood in recent times by the Western world. The path of yoga is the spiritual path leading back to the divine. It is the reintegration of our scattered pieces, spread thinly across a thousand self-identifications, external problems, bad habits and draining relationships. It is the journey back to wholeness. To oneness. It is the journey home.

Living Yoga is a system of practices, uniquely distilled and curated by Steve Harrison, under the guidance of Swami Yogeshwarananda, that support this journey back to wholeness.

It is a modern approach to the ancient technologies of yoga, combining timeless wisdom with contemporary science and practical techniques that anyone can use. In Living Yoga we follow the practices of asana (postures), pranayama (breathwork), meditation and the sharing of satsang (yogic philosophy).

Much of our everyday experience is filtered through the thinking mind. We develop ideas about who we are, what we can and cannot do, what we like and dislike, what is possible and what is not. Some of these ideas are useful, others are simply habits that have accumulated over time. The yogic process gives us an opportunity to look beyond these conditioned patterns.

Through our Living Yoga practice, we learn to listen more closely to the body, follow the breath and become more present to what is actually happening, rather than being carried along by the stories we habitually tell ourselves. It is about becoming receptive enough to experience the deeper undercurrent of our being. In time, we learn to live by inwardly referencing what we have discovered to be true within ourselves, rather than relying so much on the ideas and opinions of others.

The path of yoga is an opportunity available to all who are willing to take the journey. There are no prerequisites for practising Living Yoga. All that is required is a sincere wish to explore and discover.

THE SIX KEYS TO SUCCESS

In any endeavour, certain qualities make it more likely that we will remain engaged and receive the full benefit of our efforts. The ancient yogis recognised this and described six essential qualities for successful practice. These became known as the *Six Keys to Success*.

The Six Keys are six Sanskrit words found in the 15th-century text *Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā*. They describe qualities that support us in our practice, and actually in our life as a whole.

Although we use the traditional name *Six Keys to Success*, it is worth considering what we mean by *success* in the context of Living Yoga. Success does not mean achieving more or reaching some ideal version of who we think we should be. In Yoga, success can be understood much more simply: remaining open, committed and present enough for the practice to reveal the deeper layers of our being.

The Six Keys help us cultivate this approach. This is why we very often intone them at the beginning of a Living Yoga session.

1. VEERYA ~ Enthusiasm

Enthusiasm brings energy and life to our practice. It is the willingness to engage wholeheartedly, to bring interest and vitality to what we are doing.

2. TITIKSHA ~ Perseverance

Perseverance is the capacity to stay with the practice. Not through force or grim determination, but through a willingness to continue exploring, even when things are challenging or progress appears slow.

3. VIVEKA ~ Discernment

Discernment is the ability to see clearly. It allows us to distinguish between what is genuinely useful and what is simply habit, expectation or desire. In practice, discernment encourages us to listen inwardly and respond, rather than simply follow instructions without reference to our own experience.

4. SHRADDHA ~ Unshakeable Faith

Shraddha is a deep trust in the process. This does not require blind faith. Rather, it is the willingness to continue exploring when we cannot yet see where the exploration will lead. Our faith can gradually become grounded in our own experience.

5. PARAKRAMA ~ Courage

It takes courage to explore ourselves honestly. Courage allows us to meet whatever arises without immediately turning away, judging it or trying to change it. It gives us the willingness to step beyond what is familiar and discover what lies beyond our habitual boundaries.

6. SANGHA ~ Inspiring Company

Sangha means inspiring company or community. The company we keep has a profound influence on our lives. When people come together with a shared intention for growth and transformation, supporting and encouraging one another along the way, this is Sangha.

THE FOUR PRINCIPLES OF LIVING YOGA

The Four Principles of Living Yoga provide a simple framework for approaching the practices. Your experience will be shaped not only by what you practise, but by *how* you approach the practice.

They are not rules or instructions to be followed mechanically. They are qualities to explore - ways of approaching the body, breath and mind that allow the practice to unfold naturally.

The Four Principles are:

SUKHA ~ Ease

SPANDA ~ Pulse

LILA ~ Play

PURNA ~ Wholeness

Together, they give us a way of practising that encourages us to listen within, trust our own experience and respond from there. It is through embodying these Principles in our practice that Living Yoga becomes such a powerful process of discovery and transformation.

1. SUKHA ~ Ease

Sukha means ease. Ease is the foundation of Living Yoga. Without it, practice can easily become another activity in which we strive, compete or try to achieve something.

Living Yoga offers us a different possibility:

Can we remain at ease while meeting challenge?

Can we explore our edge without losing our connection with the breath?

Can we allow the body to open rather than forcing it to open?

Sukha is not the avoidance of difficulty. It is the ability to remain relaxed and present within whatever is happening.

This is a powerful principle not only for Yoga practice, but for life itself.

PRACTISING SUKHA

Bring your attention to the journey rather than the destination.

Let the breath be your primary guide. The depth of a posture is secondary to the quality and ease of your breathing.

Notice when you are forcing.

Trust the process rather than trying to make something happen.

The body has its own intelligence and timing. When we learn to listen rather than impose, the practice becomes more subtle and responsive.

Sukha is like a pressure-release switch.

Whenever you notice unnecessary effort, tension or striving, *soften*.

This does not mean becoming passive. It means finding the minimum amount of effort required to remain fully present and engaged.

Over time, this quality of ease can begin to influence the rest of our lives. We may discover that we don't need to push, control or resist in order to meet what is in front of us.

There can be ease even within challenge.

2. SPANDA ~ Pulse

Spanda means pulse, and refers to the natural rhythm and movement of life. It is the movement between opposing yet complementary forces: receiving and releasing, expansion and softening, activity and stillness. Life itself is a continual movement between these forces. Spanda invites us to become conscious of this natural rhythm.

The breath has a natural rhythm: *Inhale. Exhale. Receive. Release. Expand. Soften.*

This rhythm is the pulse of life itself. With each inhalation we receive - breath, energy, vitality. With each exhalation we release - tension, effort and what we no longer need.

Rather than fighting or attempting to control these natural movements, we can learn to move *with* them.

In the postures, this becomes particularly important. The breath gives movement to the body, and the body gives expression to the breath. There is a natural pulse within every posture: receiving and releasing, expanding and softening.

When we become more receptive to this pulse, we allow the breath to guide the movement from within, rather than trying to make the posture happen. We begin to feel the posture emerge from the inside.

This is one of the distinctive features of Living Yoga.

Rather than imposing a fixed idea upon the body, we allow the pulse, in the form of the breath, to guide the body from within into its own expression of the posture. The more receptive we become to this process, the more it feels as though the breath is moving the body, rather than our mind instructing it.

The result is a much deeper experience of connection between body, breath and the energy within.

3. LILA ~ Play

Lila means play. Playfulness brings curiosity, freedom and lightness to our practice. With Sukha and Spanda as our foundation, we can *explore our edges*.

Where is there an edge in my body today?

What happens if I explore it gently?

What happens if I back away slightly?

Can I remain curious without needing to prove anything?

This is the spirit of Lila.

Playing our edge does not mean forcing ourselves to the limit. It means exploring what is possible while remaining connected to the breath and receptive to what the body is telling us.

The point is not to achieve more. The point is to discover. Sometimes we discover that we can go further than we thought. Sometimes we discover that we need to do less.

PRACTISING LILA

Listen to the breath.

Notice the point at which you are satisfied.

Explore the possibility that less might be more.

Bring some humour into your practice.

Nudge and tease your edges rather than forcing them.

Try something and notice what happens.

Your edge will be different from one day to the next, and even from one moment to the next. Lila invites us to be curious about these changes rather than trying to control them.

A useful question is simply: *Does it feel good?*

Not *does it look good?*

Not *am I getting somewhere?*

But, *what is the experience telling me?*

There is a wonderful meeting point between the carefree playfulness of a child and the watchful wisdom of a sage.

This is Lila.

4. PURNA ~ Wholeness

Purna means wholeness, completeness or fulfilment. Purna points towards the deeper purpose of Yoga. We are not practising Yoga in order to become whole. We are practising in order to discover the wholeness within that is already here.

Much of our experience is fragmented. The body can be doing one thing while the mind is somewhere else. We can be physically present but mentally absorbed in the past or future. We can want one thing while another part of us resists it.

Purna invites us to bring your whole self to what you are doing. When you practise, practise wholeheartedly. When you listen, listen wholeheartedly. When you eat, eat. When you walk, walk. When you are with somebody, be with them.

There is no need to try to make life extraordinary. There is something extraordinary about being completely present to ordinary life.

In our Living Yoga practice, Purna can be experienced when body, breath and mind come together. A posture arrives at *fulfilment* not because it has reached some externally defined ideal, but because there is nothing missing from our experience of it.

We are not trying to make the experience into something more. We are simply here, fully. And we discover something deeply fulfilling in this experience. You could call it *perfection* - not perfection according to an external standard, but the fullest expression of what is possible in this particular moment.

And because every moment is different, we cannot repeat the same perfection twice. Purna allows each experience to be exactly what it is.

THE FOUR PRINCIPLES TOGETHER

The Four Principles support one another.

Sukha gives us ease.

Spanda connects us with the natural pulse of life.

Lila gives us the freedom to explore.

Purna brings us into wholeness.

Together they provide a way of practising that is neither passive nor forceful. We learn to relax without becoming passive, to explore without striving, and to engage without needing to achieve. The ancient yogis called this *Effortless Effort*.

Most importantly, they remind us that the practice is not about becoming better or more. It is about becoming more fully present to the experience of being here. The Four Principles provide a way of entering that exploration.

THE BREATH

Breath is at the heart of Living Yoga. We breathe constantly, yet most of the time we are barely aware that we are doing it. The breath happens by itself, carrying on whether we pay attention or not. Yoga invites us to become conscious of this most fundamental of processes.

When we bring awareness to the breath, something begins to change. We become more attuned to the body, more aware of our inner state and less caught up in the constant activity of the thinking mind. Breathwork therefore becomes far more than a collection of breathing techniques to make us feel better. It becomes a way of moving beyond the thinking mind and into the deeper ground of your being.

PRANAYAMA

The yogic practices of conscious breathing are traditionally known as Pranayama. *Prana* is often translated as life force or vital energy, while *yama* can mean regulation or control. In Living Yoga, the emphasis is not simply on controlling the breath, but on learning to listen to it. Most of us have developed breathing patterns that reflect our lifestyle, our emotional state and the tensions we carry in the body. Through practice, we can begin to restore a more natural and functional relationship with the breath.

In Living Yoga, Ujjayi Breathing and Double Breathing form the foundations of the breathwork practice, offering everything needed to begin and to explore deeply.

UJJAYI BREATHING

Ujjayi means "victorious" or "triumphant" breath. The name suggests the quality of strength and steadiness that can arise when we learn to breathe consciously through whatever we encounter.

Ujjayi is created by gently narrowing the passage at the back of the throat, producing a soft, audible sound as the breath moves in and out. It's important to be patient, it can take time for the Ujjayi to become smooth and established – but with regular practice, rest assured, it will come!

The sound gives the mind something to listen to. Rather than being carried away by thoughts, we can use the sound and sensation of the breath to draw our awareness inward. The breath becomes an anchor.

As the practice develops, Ujjayi can help us remain calm and present while meeting challenge. Instead of automatically reacting to tension, we learn to stay connected to

the breath and to what is actually happening. This quality of conscious breathing can have a profound effect on our experience.

The breath influences the nervous system, the rhythm of the heart and the overall state of the body and mind. When breathing becomes slower, smoother and more balanced, we often experience a corresponding sense of calm and internal steadiness. But the deeper purpose of Ujjayi is not simply relaxation. It is to develop an intimate relationship with the breath.

The breath becomes teacher, guide and mirror. It tells us when we are forcing. It tells us when we have moved beyond our capacity. It tells us when there is ease. It teaches us how to listen.

UJJAYI IN PRACTICE

Allow the breath to take priority over the depth of the posture.

If the breath becomes strained, shortened or uncomfortable, something needs to change.

Follow the breath rather than trying to make the body conform to an idea of what the posture should look like.

Trust the breath. Allow it to become smooth and continuous.

Where possible, cultivate a circular quality to the breath, so that there is no unnecessary pause or interruption between inhalation and exhalation.

The aim is not to produce a perfect breath. It is to become increasingly sensitised to what the breath is telling you.

With patience, the breath can become a co-creator of the practice rather than something we simply use to accompany movement.

As you explore the Living Yoga sessions, you will discover that Ujjayi Breath is also used as a foundation for many of the meditation practices.

DOUBLE BREATHING

Double Breathing is a signature practice of Living Yoga and it can have many uplifting effects on the body and mind. It can energise and purify the system, stimulate circulation and create a powerful sense of vitality in the system. But these effects are not the whole purpose of the breath.

The Double Breathing practice is not about chasing the enlivened sensations that can arise as the system becomes energised. Instead, Double Breathing offers a powerful shift in how we experience ourself underneath the usual mental activity, into a state we call *Dynamic Stillness*.

DYNAMIC STILLNESS

Dynamic Stillness is one of the distinctive experiences of Living Yoga arising through Double Breathing. It is a meeting of movement and stillness. The body has been energised through the breathing and then becomes quiet.

The mind may continue to produce thoughts, emotions and sensations, yet we can experience more space around them, allowing them to pass without the compulsive need to get involved.

Instead, we *switch from thinking to feeling*, turning our attention inward towards the actual present moment experience within the body.

Rather than thinking *about* yourself, you begin to *experience* yourself. As the surface activity of body and mind settles, we become receptive to something quieter and more fundamental beneath it all - the deeper undercurrent of the energy we are made of.

Approach Dynamic Stillness with respect and reverence, allowing the body and mind to surrender into the experience of the deeper ground of your being. The experience cannot be adequately described. It has to be felt. And, as with all Yoga practice, it is through your own experience that understanding comes.

THE POSTURES

Yoga postures are so much more than physical stretching. Through the practice of Asana, we learn to inhabit the body more fully and authentically - becoming more attuned to its patterns, tensions and possibilities, and gradually allowing it to return towards its natural state of ease and vitality.

In Living Yoga, Ujjayi breathing and the Four Principles are woven into the postures.

The breath guides the movement: the inhalation creates one quality of movement; the exhalation another. Rather than holding the body rigidly in a shape, we allow the posture to breathe, to follow the *pulse*.

The Four Principles shape how we relate to the body, breath and mind, teaching us how to listen and respond from within. The body and mind are not separate. Our physical state influences our mental and emotional experience, just as our thoughts, emotions and habitual patterns are reflected in the body. As we release physical tension, we may also begin to uncover and release some of the deeper patterns held within us.

RELEASING TENSION

The postures are designed to help release accumulated tension and restore greater freedom and alignment throughout the body. When tension is held unconsciously, it can restrict movement, affect our breathing and influence the way we experience ourselves. As the body softens, we may discover that some of what we have been holding physically is also connected to patterns of tension in the mind.

The process is gradual. There is no need to force the body open. Using the breath as a guide, we can explore our edges with curiosity and patience, allowing the body to respond in its own time. The Four Principles provide the foundation:

Sukha – maintain ease.

Spanda – move with the natural pulse of the breath.

Lila – explore your edge in the postures with playfulness.

Purna – bring your whole self to the experience.

With patient persistence and a willingness to meet the body where it is, the body will gradually become more open, free and at ease.

MOVING MEDITATION

The different postures of Living Yoga are woven together through the flow of the breath. This is known as Vinyasa. Rather than stopping and starting between postures, we consciously travel from one posture to another, coordinating movement with the breath.

Vinyasa means to travel consciously and gracefully between postures in harmony with the flow of the breath. The transitions become part of the practice rather than something that happens between the postures.

This creates a quality of continuous movement and an experience of *moving meditation*. This is another one of the distinguishing aspects of Living Yoga.

SELF-PACING

Self-Pacing is a foundation of Living Yoga. The body will be different in every practice session. It is meant to be. The key is to tune into your body's condition in each session, and give it what it needs rather than what you want it to be able to do. Often, less is more.

When you listen well, the body responds. When you repeatedly override its feedback, it needs time to recover – and this is true for not just the posture practice but also the breathwork and meditation practices. Self-Pacing asks for patience and a longer-term view. There is no need to hurry. A regular and consistent practice allows the body, breath and mind to unfold gradually.

LIVING YOUR YOGA

The various physical and mental benefits of the practice are many, yet they are not the ultimate purpose of the practice. As we become more deeply connected to the body, breath and intuitive feeling within, the practices become a doorway back to ourself. And it is from here that we can begin to discover the deeper essence of our being.

The body is constantly communicating with us. Through the breath, sensation and feeling, it gives us information about when to open, when to soften, when to stay and when to move on. As we become more attuned to our inner feedback system, we can develop an intuitive relationship with the body. We learn to listen, respond and most importantly, trust what it is telling us.

We are learning to work *with* the body, rather than imposing our will upon it. And in time, we begin to see that this way of listening and responding extends beyond the practice. We are learning to work *with* life, rather than imposing our will upon it.

We are learning to *live our Yoga*.

BEGIN YOUR PRACTICE

The On Demand library gives you access to a range of guided Living Yoga sessions, allowing you to explore the practices introduced in this handbook and develop your own personal practice at a pace that feels right for you.

We invite you to begin with the introductory videos and, from there, explore the wider Living Yoga library.

We hope you enjoy exploring the practices and discovering the true gifts of Living Yoga.

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