

KARA-LEAH GRANT

The NO-MORE-EXCUSES Guide to YOGA



Because Yoga is for every body

“Let Kara-Leah lead you in this adventure that will transform you and transfigure you to the light and the love that is our natural state.”

Mark Whitwell, author of *Yoga of Heart* and *The Promise*

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS YOGA? 13

1. COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT YOGA 17

I'm not flexible enough to do yoga 17

I haven't got enough time to practice yoga 22

I'm too old to practice yoga 25

Real men don't do yoga 29

I'm too large to practice yoga 32

I've got a physical limitation or disability
so can't practice yoga 35

2. COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT YOGA 39

The language of yoga: common Sanskrit terms 39

What are the benefits of yoga practice? 46

How fit do i need to be? 54

Will yoga keep me young forever? 56

Will yoga give me a great body? 60

Is yoga a religion? Do I need to be spiritual? 65

What are you OM about? 70

3. YOGA PHILOSOPHY, HISTORY & CONCEPTS 77

A brief history of yoga and lineages 77

Yoga texts: the Bhaga what? 82

The four paths of yoga 87

The eight limbs of yoga 91

Intro to Kleshas & Gunas 96

A quick tour through the Koshas 101

Kundalini, Prana, Nadis, Chakras and the Subtle Body 105

4. YOUR YOGA PRACTICE 111

The practice: what can it include? 111

Yoga off the mat: yoga, relationships and life 117

Home yoga practice: is it for me, I've just started!? 119

5. CHOOSING TEACHERS, CLASSES & STUDIOS 125

Yoga styles: finding your fit 125

How to find a great yoga teacher 132

How to choose the right yoga studio for you 137

Yoga etiquette: the do's and don'ts of yoga classes 142

Danger signs: how to keep yourself sexually safe 147

Dealing with fear: everybody's intimidated
going to their first class 152

Coming home: the ultimate teacher is you
a.k.a don't give your power away! 156

6. IN CLASS 161

Why is the breath so important in yoga? 161

How to approach asana and alignment 167

Yoga injuries: how to keep yourself safe 171

Adjustments: yes or no? 175

What does it mean to “breathe into it”? 179

Strangeness on the mat: crying, laughing, groaning, farting,
grimaces and twitches 184

Forget about everybody else: find your centre 187

CONCLUSION: FINDING TIME, MAKING TIME,
HANGING IN THERE 193

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 197

ABOUT THE AUTHOR 199

INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS YOGA?

Welcome to the World of Yoga – a place where we use our bodies to explore our psyches and gain mastery over our minds.

Whether you've already done a few classes and want to know more about Yoga, or you've never taken a class in your life, you're in the right place.

Heck, maybe you're not ready at all and have been talking about trying yoga for years, but something always got in the way. Instead of trying yoga, you thought you might read a book about it instead. Even if that's you... you're still in the right place. It's my aim to blast through all those excuses you have about why you haven't started practicing and get you into class and onto a yoga mat.

After reading this book, you'll have no more excuses to keep out of the yoga room.

On a much sneakier level, this book also attempts to give you a taste of yoga so in the *act* of reading it you are actually practicing yoga. Sometimes I'll ask you to stop and breathe in a certain way, sometimes I'll ask you what's going on in your head right now and if you can watch those thoughts without identifying with them. Sometimes I might even ask you to meditate for a moment or two. This is all yoga, because as it's about to become abundantly clear, yoga is far more than just the practice of physical postures.

You may still be unsure about trying this yoga thing – maybe you think you're too inflexible or too old or too big or too male. These are common misconceptions people can have about yoga and I'll demolish them one by one. Plus I'll also answer some of

the most common questions I hear from people who want to start yoga.

After that, we'll take a look at the history and the philosophy of yoga as well as the concepts you may come across in class. I'll tell you all about the practice of yoga and what that might include because yoga is not just about bending and stretching into funny looking postures.

We'll investigate teachers, classes, studios and retreats so you know how to find a great teacher and what warning signs to look out for – not all teachers are good teachers and some are downright bad. I'll lead you by the hand into your first yoga class so you can feel comfortable, keep yourself safe, and understand the many strange things that make up Yoga.

There is a lot of material to cover, but you don't have to read it all in one go. There may be some chapters that don't apply to you. For this reason, this book is more like a reference book – each chapter is designed to stand alone.

Most of you will have come to this book with an idea that yoga = yoga postures. This is like living next to a harbour your entire life and thinking that the water contained inside the harbour is the ocean. One day, you board a ship and sail out of the harbour and discover to your amazement that *this* is the Ocean. For most of us asana – or postures – are our first port of call when it comes to yoga. That's where we start and it's a fantastic place to start. Why? Because most of us are so disconnected from our bodies that we desperately need to practice asana so we can learn to live inside our bodies again.

But this is not where yoga ends, and this book – while spending plenty of time talking about asana, asana classes, asana teachers – is written from the perspective of Yoga as the ocean – not the harbour.

When I'm talking about Yoga with a capital Y, I'm talking about Yoga as a process where one learns to be fully present with the moment.

Yoga is the journey of the Self, through the Self, to the Self.*

That's all. And the *practice* of yoga (small y) is what we *do*, ourselves, as we journey through ourselves, to ourselves. That practice is asana – but it's also pranayama, meditation, chanting and practices included on paths like Karma Yoga.

Practicing asana teaches us about yoga until finally we live our lives from a total state of Yoga – a state of presence.

But don't worry too much about whether you get this or not at this point. You don't have to get it... it's just an introduction so that you can start asking questions. Because that is a big part of yoga – inquiring into your experience.

Many of us are looking for answers to life's big questions – Who am I? What do I want? What's my purpose? What's the point of life? Where am I going?

Yoga is one way to explore those questions... that's the beginning of the journey of the Self. It's a journey that ultimately starts with our bodies – not our minds. Because while our minds can spin all sorts of thoughts and beliefs about the way we are and the way the world is, our body is grounded in the here and now. Our body is as it is. It will tell us the truth, from moment to moment.

In essence our body doesn't just *house* our mind or psyche – it *is* our mind or psyche. The practice of yoga as we mostly know it in the West – physical postures – affects our body, which in turn affects our psyche. In simple terms, this is why breathing mindfully

* It's likely this is a translation of 13:24 of The Bhagavad Gita – the text it's attributed to.

*By meditation, some men
can see the Self in the self;
others, by the yoga of knowledge;
others, by selfless action.* (translation Stephen Mitchell)

while moving our body can have such a profound affect. It's why it can lead to an awakening of Self and a shift in consciousness as we realise we are not the small separate limited ego-self we've always believed, but actually an infinite, connected part of a larger whole.

This shift of consciousness is not reserved for the most dedicated of yoga practitioners or those with the most perfect of postures, or committed pranayama or lengthy meditations. This shift of consciousness is available to every one of us – it is the natural evolution of a human being. We will all wake up to our inherent inter-connectedness, one day or another.

Self-realisation is ultimately what yoga is all about – realising the Self. For today though, your yoga could be all about lengthening your hamstrings, opening your shoulders, building strength, or losing weight.

That is enough. The rest, it doesn't matter. It's always there, waiting for you when you're ready. But just knowing, before you go to your first class that yoga is about more than forward bends, twists and backbends gives you some context for what might happen in class, or inside of you.

So step forth into the world of yoga, knowing that it will meet you where you are, and you can take as much or as little as you like from the practice. Know that nothing is asked of you except that you show up, that you are curious, and that you stay open to your experience. Forget everything you think you may know and be like a child again – curious, open and enthusiastic to explore. That is where Yoga will meet you, and that's where this book will take you.

First though, we're going to blast through some of those misconceptions that might be keeping you off the yoga mat and out of the yoga class.