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Introduction

*This world is a bridge.
Pass over it.
But do not build your dwelling there.*
The Gospel of Thomas

Yoga for modern times

We live in extraordinary times. Never before have humans been exposed to so many changes, in all areas of life. Crises and transformations – individual, relational, social, cultural, political, economic and environmental – are rapidly increasing and constantly challenging everything and everyone.¹

Challenges help us grow. We are forced to do the best we can, and we can use any tool that strengthens us. The connection with our own heart and centre is the best remedy available. Traditional values and old structures are losing their grip in current times. The belief and faith in ready-made solutions, offered by authorities outside us, diminishes. The modern, conscious human being strives towards individualization. He no longer looks at himself as part of a group (a family, belief system, race or country), as before. Rather, he considers himself a unique living being, with his own gifts, talents purposes and tasks. He looks for new ways to solve problems and pathways to find himself. He seeks connection with other people and nature from within, from his heart. He seeks to be liberated from abuse, power and suppression, useless stress and loss of identity.

For the first time in history, we are also witnessing a worldwide tendency towards globalization. Manipulative and power hungry forces are working to gain total control over all aspects of everyone's lives.²

What, then, is the connection with the ever-growing popularity of yoga?

A beautiful story: Nasruddin, a potter who rode a horse

(Nasruddin is a popular figure in classic Indian tales.)

Nasruddin, the potter, made all types of pottery, neti pots, water jugs, teapots, cooking pots, flower pots... For the shapes, he derived his inspiration from his wife, who had a creative mind and dreamt at night about pots of unseen beauty. During the day, she would then describe these dreams to her husband who based his designs and decorations on them. Nasruddin would bring his works to the market. They were very popular because of their astonishing beauty. Selling them made enough money to live simply, and to buy a donkey to carry the pots to the market.

One day, the donkey broke the fence and went to graze on the neighbour's pasture. There, the donkey found a herb that tasted amazingly good but that eventually drove him

crazy. When Nasruddin needed the donkey to go to the market, it was jumping like mad in the neighbour's garden. It was kicking and stumping fiercely and braying extremely loud. In this condition, it was impossible to pack him with fragile pots and jugs. Nasruddin was desperate and sad.

The neighbour – who had seen everything – felt pity and offered him the use of his horse that week.

The potter accepted his offer with much pleasure. What a stroke of luck, he thought. That horse is much bigger than my donkey, so I will be able to sell a lot more pots at the market this week. So he packed the horse as heavily as he could.

Nasruddin did not know much about horses, because he was used to his donkey. So he placed a ladder against the horse and climbed it, equipped with the stick that he used to drive the donkey. To depart, he beat the horse firmly with his stick. The horse was so frightened that it bolted away. Full of surprise, the neighbour saw Nasruddin, galloping around the house. He hung across the horse's neck and clung to its manes. There were fragments of pots and crocks all over the place.

'But Nasruddin, where are you going?' the neighbour asked.

'I do not know, ask the horse', he answered.

Aren't we also galloping from one place to the other, totally stressed out? We're too busy, we don't have time, and we're constantly juggling different activities, appointments and busy schedules. We get up, hurry up, have breakfast, take the kids to school, quickly head to work, buy groceries, get stuck in traffic, arrive home, go to the sports club, have some fun time, friends, obligations, family, holidays...

Where are we going? Ask the horse, this culture, our habits, expectations from others, society ... Nasruddin cannot let go for one second or he will fall. But he himself does not even know how and where he is being carried.

Where are you going?

Who or what determines and conditions the direction and the meaning of your own life?

How can you take control of your life?

How can you entrust the power of your own being to your wise inner Self?

Yoga can be a valuable tool on this path

Yoga is one of the oldest systems of self-development and it is also - valid in these hectic and extraordinary times.

The purpose of yoga and meditation is to learn to say 'stop' to agitation: to become aware and awake, to regenerate with rest and action, to become your Self, to become silent, to listen to the inner voice. To create time and space to connect with that immense power and peace within yourself. The inner core, in the hearts of everyone, will not allow itself to be dominated or manipulated. Gently, it radiates an irrepressible tendency towards peace, happiness and harmony. Yoga is a path of liberation from all obstacles and suffering; when adapted to the needs and nature of modern human beings, it can truly help us.

*A man is free only insofar as he is able to follow himself at any moment of his life.*³ Learn how to stop and master the galloping horse. Learn how to stop those unconscious drifts, habits and automatic actions that govern your life. Come home to yourself. Feel your body. Feel your breath. Feel your heart. Feel and observe your thoughts. Purify your body, emotions and mind. Learn how to listen to the profound messages of your heart and do not get carried away by desires, manipulations and illusions. Instead, learn to be the master of the victim of your body, senses, emotions and thoughts. Learn how to live your life from your deepest essence. Do not let yourself be misled and/or abused. Think about the beautiful opening of the Bhagavad Gita where Krishna (*symbol of the absolute truth*) leads Arjuna (*symbol of the honest, seeking human, with all his questions and doubts*), on the chariot (*symbol of the body*) pulled by five

white horses (*symbol of the power and beauty of the restrained and purified senses*) safely to the battlefield of life.

How and why this book was written

Ever since I chose - about thirty years ago – the yoga path as my path of life instead of pursuing a career in philosophy, I have been trying to reconcile both in some way.

To me, yoga is also an appropriate way to attain several of my youth ideals. Peace, harmony, health, contentment, close contact with nature, connecting with the purpose of life and more of these concepts in many philosophy books fascinated me. Now they come to life in yoga. They become part of a practice-oriented discipline that can change everyone's quality of life for good. And so I acquired the habit of also teaching and writing about the theoretical aspects of yoga, besides practice-oriented classes and courses. I write for our three-monthly yoga magazine (*Soma-berichten*), for well-known Dutch yoga magazines and, of course, compile most of the course material for our yoga training sessions. Writing is a kind of meditation: in the here and now, with concentrated attention, you make contact with the world of ideas and try to understand them and to make them understandable.

As Yogi Bhajan said: *If you want to learn something, read about it. If you want to understand something, write about it. If you want to master something, teach it.* After so many experiences with different teachers and methods, yoga became a path of development in so many ways. I noticed that my style developed in a unique way. There was a need for a name and a concept that would embody this experience and so, gradually, Prana Yoga Flow was born: with its own theoretical background, adapted to this time and to the development of modern people in the West.

Nasruddin, in the story above, could not control the horse with his donkey stick. After all, each animal requires an individual, adapted approach. You cannot master new facts with old methods and instruments. Similarly, we cannot simply import yoga techniques from the past into this time without any modification. In this context, it is also not advisable to imitate the old Indian teacher (guru) – student relationship. Modern western man has a different body, a different path of evolution, different emotional behaviour, a different way of thinking and different goals than the old yogis in the Himalayas. Thus, adaptations to the system are required, without losing sight of the inestimable value and the depth of yoga. Under the impulse of countless factors such as tangible results, popularity, commercial temptations, rigid attachment to the old, the drive for renewal, spirituality, science, research, practice-orientation and philosophy, yoga has recently gone through an extremely rapid development. My wish in writing this book about Prana Yoga Flow is to make an enriching contribution to this evolution.

That is why I found it an interesting idea to summarize the hundreds of pictures and texts written earlier and to present them, updated, in book form. Thus, I gratefully accepted the offer by Ankh-Hermes. Compiling the book became a path of development, similar to the practice of yoga: a continuous source of discoveries and adaptations. The 'material' limitations - in this case the number of pages and the deadline - were the framework of the challenge: describing the mere essence. That is why, in this book, several subjects did not receive the space they deserve: the bibliography will refer you to complementary information and sources.

What you will find in this book

At the start of this book you will find a summary of my experiences during my thirty-year journey in the world of yoga, including some sources of inspiration and the fundamentals of Prana Yoga Flow.

Next, I will take you on a discovery of the following subjects:

- ☸ The bodies of man according to holistic anatomy; knowledge that can turn physical exercises into valuable self-healing and transformative elements.
- ☸ A short summary of the eight steps of the yoga path according to Patanjali; knowing that up until this day, this age-old tradition still proves its inestimable practical value.
- ☸ The meaning of yoga within our current environmental problems; with valuable information about healthy food, sustainable energy consumption and peace consciousness.
- ☸ Basic information about the energy channels (nadis and meridians) and the energy centres (chakras) of the subtle body, where the heart is the key to enlarging your self-consciousness and unfolding paths for self-development.
- ☸ The fundamentals of Prana Yoga Flow; an interesting mix of old and new elements to optimize your yoga practice and to adapt it to your own needs and aspirations.

Later in this book you will be carefully guided in the practice of:

- ☸ The bandhas, Ujjayi breath, alignment, the vinyasas, the sun salutations, the asanas (body poses), the pranayama (breathing exercises), several meditations and relaxation techniques will be discussed. Many illustrations and instructions on how to perform these exercises and the effects on different levels guide you when practicing the asanas. Different options and tips encourage you to carry out asanas, vinyasas and sun salutations in a responsible and creative manner. This allows you to adapt your practice to your individual needs and make it as efficient as possible for your own release process.
- ☸ At the end you will find the basic Prana Yoga Flow series and valuable innovative instructions to compose your own Prana Yoga Flows, according to your own needs and goals, personality, problems and energy of the moment.

Horse-riding, as well as yoga, is difficult to learn only with the help of a book. This book can be a valuable accompaniment to your practice and enrich your comprehension of yoga. Still, the best way to learn yoga is and remains personal contact, i.e. classes with a good, 'living teacher' who gives you specific advice.

I wish you all lots of light, insights, growth, leaps of consciousness, joy and peace: during yoga and in the further course of your precious existence.

Warm sun salutations

Namaste (all that is highest in me salutes all that is highest in you)

OM

Alberto Paganini

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