



Taking
Yoga
BEYOND THE
MAT INTO OUR
Every
Day

In the sanctuary of a yoga studio, a retreat or a tranquil spot in the countryside, it's easier to feel at peace with the world and with ourselves.

But what happens when we step off the yoga mat and into the chaos and stress of everyday life? What happens when we fall out with a friend, have a bad day, or lose our job? Is there a way to anchor in our yoga practice? Does yoga even apply to such turbulent environments?

People are becoming increasingly aware that there is far more to yoga than poses and breathing exercises. For thousands of years, yoga has been a deep philosophy of life, a way of living skilfully. The Bhagavad-gita, a classic yoga text, defines yoga as "skilfulness in action." Whenever we live in a way that brings out the very best in us, that unites us with our highest potential, we are practising yoga.

I first learned about yoga philosophy as a young boy. I travelled to India and lived as a monk in temples and monasteries for ten years. For 16 years I apprenticed with an elderly master practitioner in the Bhakti tradition, within an unbroken line of teachers dating back generations.

In India, I learned about the benefits of challenge and difficulty in yoga practice. If you are a pilot, your "skilfulness in action" is not tested or honed when flight conditions are perfect. Rather, your skill is tested in the face of adversity—a fierce storm, the loss of an engine, the sudden failure of your instruments. It's easy to glide along with skill when everything seems to be going well in life, when there is no turbulence. Our yoga is challenged by difficulty.

This explains why the yoga teachings of the Bhagavad-gita were not delivered on the pleasant bank of a river or in a forest grove; they were spoken in the middle of a battlefield. These teachings are meant for the most difficult and demanding action. The battlefield setting represents the chaos of everyday engagement, the swift and sometimes turbulent environment of everyday life. This is the best arena for practising yoga.

MY JOURNEY TO KURUKSHETRA

The Bhagavad-gita, a dialogue between Shri Krishna and the warrior-prince Arjuna, is a book about fighting the adversaries within and winning. These are the obstacles that prevent us from manifesting our full potential.

So how do we become a “yoga warrior”? I decided one day to travel to Kurukshetra—the place where Arjuna in the Bhagavad-gita had asked the very same question—and put this question to one of the monks.

“Kurukshetra is a place of illumination,” he began, “but it is also where Arjuna fell into confusion and despair. It is therefore that place that holds the secret for crossing over from crisis to illumination through yoga.

“Like Arjuna we each have to face our own individual battles. We are faced with battles within us and outside us. Our external battles occur only because of our inner battles. They reflect the unresolved conflicts within us. Conflict confronts us with all the parts of us we are least conscious of and often least wish to look at.”

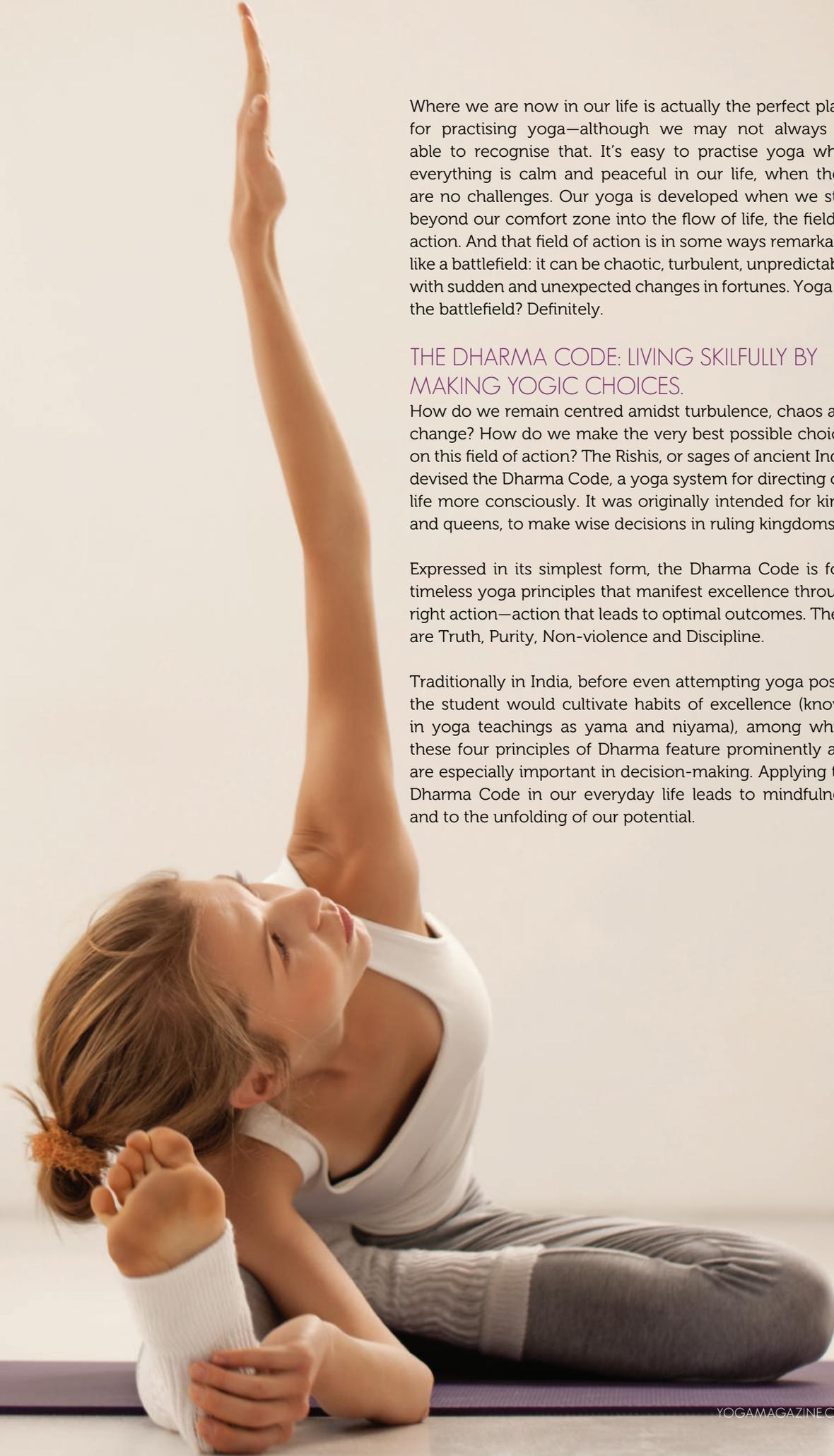
“How should we go about facing these conflicts? How should we act?” I asked.

“The teachings of the Bhagavad-gita are all about action,” the monk explained. “Kurukshetra is the field of action. Kuru in Sanskrit comes from ‘kri’, meaning ‘action’, and ‘kshetra’ means ‘field’. In that sense each of us is at Kurukshetra, the field of action, at all times. The real question is how will we act on that field? Some ways of acting support us; they lead to beneficial outcomes. Other ways of acting bring us down and lead to unhelpful or harmful outcomes.”

We may not have control over what occurs in our life, but we can control what choices we make and what actions we take. The monk explained that in ancient India the sages and seers had a name for “right action”, or action that manifests our full potential. They called it “Dharma.”

“Don’t think that Kurukshetra is limited only to a physical location in India,” the monk added. “If you make every moment in your life sacred, then you make your entire life sacred. Making your life sacred is called ‘yoga’.”

Suddenly I understood something about the Bhagavad-gita that had always eluded me. We need to create a sacred space to act even amidst the greatest chaos and confusion.



Where we are now in our life is actually the perfect place for practising yoga—although we may not always be able to recognise that. It's easy to practise yoga when everything is calm and peaceful in our life, when there are no challenges. Our yoga is developed when we step beyond our comfort zone into the flow of life, the field of action. And that field of action is in some ways remarkably like a battlefield: it can be chaotic, turbulent, unpredictable, with sudden and unexpected changes in fortunes. Yoga on the battlefield? Definitely.

THE DHARMA CODE: LIVING SKILFULLY BY MAKING YOGIC CHOICES.

How do we remain centred amidst turbulence, chaos and change? How do we make the very best possible choices on this field of action? The Rishis, or sages of ancient India, devised the Dharma Code, a yoga system for directing our life more consciously. It was originally intended for kings and queens, to make wise decisions in ruling kingdoms.

Expressed in its simplest form, the Dharma Code is four timeless yoga principles that manifest excellence through right action—action that leads to optimal outcomes. These are Truth, Purity, Non-violence and Discipline.

Traditionally in India, before even attempting yoga poses, the student would cultivate habits of excellence (known in yoga teachings as yama and niyama), among which these four principles of Dharma feature prominently and are especially important in decision-making. Applying the Dharma Code in our everyday life leads to mindfulness and to the unfolding of our potential.

There is a way to bring yoga into our business or professional life. It can be applied to our relationships. It is relevant also to the way we manage our time and our money. We bring yoga into our life first and foremost through the choices we make each day. We do so by aligning with Truth, by remaining pure-hearted, by practising Non-violence even if there is violence all around us, and by breathing life into these teachings through Discipline.

The Dharma Code is a system for directing our life more consciously and for addressing life's more difficult decisions. When these defining moments present themselves, we have an opportunity to deepen our yoga practice. By being mindful when making choices, we can take our yoga practice beyond the yoga mat and make it a guiding life practice.

WRITTEN BY

SIMON HAAS

SIMON IS A TEACHER OF DHARMA AND YOGA PHILOSOPHY, PURANIC STORY TELLER, AND "ARCHAEOLOGIST" OF ANCIENT WISDOM. HE IS AUTHOR OF THE BOOK OF DHARMA: MAKING ENLIGHTENED CHOICES. WWW.BOOKOFDHARMA.COM

