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WINTER 2019 / ISSUE 60, £4.95
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9772055280003 60

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Yoga for Difficult Times

BY SIMON HAAS

There's a lot more to yoga than yoga poses, called "asana". For thousands of years, yoga has been a deep philosophy of life, a way of living skilfully.

The *Bhagavad Gita*, an ancient classic on yoga, teaches us how to make daily life our yoga practice. It offers beautiful definitions of yoga, such as "skill in action", "breaking the connection with suffering" and "the unwavering offering of love".

We each hold untold promise and potential; we each have a unique contribution to make in the world. To understand and manifest that potential in our everyday life requires great skill. That *skill in action* is called yoga.

YOGA FOR CRISIS, DEPRESSION AND DESPAIR

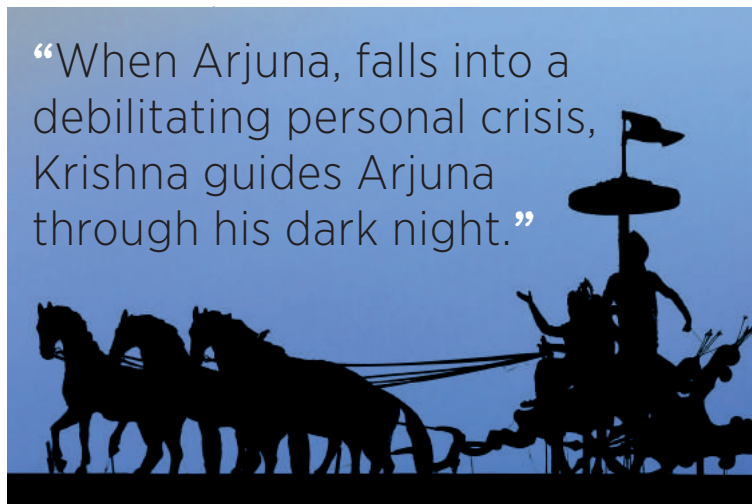
We usually associate yoga with tranquillity and wellbeing. But can yoga also be about traversing darkness, crisis and despair?

A dark night of the soul is a period in our life of intense inner turmoil that strikes us at the very core of our existence. In ancient India, crisis was viewed as an important time of transition, a deep rite of passage. Yogis and mystics studied crisis and noticed the common attributes of a dark night, viewing it as a potent experience leading to spiritual awakening.

The immense potency of crisis is recognised by the *Gita*. When its hero, the warrior Arjuna, falls into a debilitating personal crisis in the middle of a battlefield, Krishna, his friend and charioteer, guides Arjuna through his dark night.

THREE TEACHINGS ON CRISIS FROM THE GITA

- **Honour the dark night as a rite of passage.** The first teaching of the *Gita* is that crisis is not something to fear; it can be a gift. In our society, there's a stigma attached to crisis. We often try to conceal, resist or bypass the experience. But by reframing darkness, it becomes part of our yoga journey, and we can allow it to transform and deepen us.
- **Surrender the need to control.** During a dark night of the soul, the personal narratives




we've lived by begin to disintegrate. Struggling to navigate the darkness, we discover that the more we cling to our broken narrative, the more intensely we suffer.

Krishna reminds Arjuna that while pain is an inevitable part of life, suffering is our mental response to that pain. Krishna explains that we can work with pain skilfully by removing our resistance to it. This graceful acceptance of pain actually releases it, detoxifying us and facilitating a powerful transformation.

- **Trust your inner guide.** A dark night of the soul invites us to pay less attention to the relentless chatter of the mind, and to listen instead to the voice of the Universal Teacher within. The Universal Teacher assumes different forms in our life to lead us towards the fulfilment of our highest potential. Hearing our inner guide requires a different type of listening, known as "surrendered listening": a genuine desire to honour truth in whichever way it reveals itself.

DISCOVERING THE TRUE WEALTH OF YOGA

Applying these principles during a personal crisis is an act of deep self-kindness. It reduces suffering and creates a sacred space for yoga wisdom to blossom in our heart. It can help us develop "divine" qualities, what Krishna calls the wealth of the gods and goddesses.

Love, gratitude, truthfulness, humility, kindness, patience, hope, courage, generosity: these are divine qualities. Anger, hate, fear, shame, arrogance, self-pity, greed, contempt and resentment are destructive qualities. When we exercise our divine potential, we experience divine outcomes. 



MEET THE AUTHOR

SIMON HAAS is a teacher of yoga philosophy, specializing in applying ancient wisdom to everyday life. From the age of 13, he began studying India's sacred texts and spent ten years living in temples and monasteries in India. He is the author of *The Book of Dharma: Making Enlightened Choices*.

On the web

www.simonhaas.com

Bookshelf

YOGA AND THE DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL: THE SOUL'S JOURNEY TO SACRED LOVE BY SIMON HAAS, published by Veda Wisdom Books, Paperback (384 pages)

