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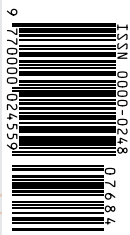
Sustained
Samadhi: Life in
a Flow State

DAAJI

Living Your
Yoga: The Inner
Tradition Beyond
the Mat

BHUSHAN

BHUKTE



Flow

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“

My heart was in a cage. My life was a long struggle to find happiness, to overcome fear, and to find love I had lost. I did not give up, and that is what my story is about.

—ICHAK K. ADIZES

”

Presenting a wonderful life journey written by Dr. Ichak K. Adizes

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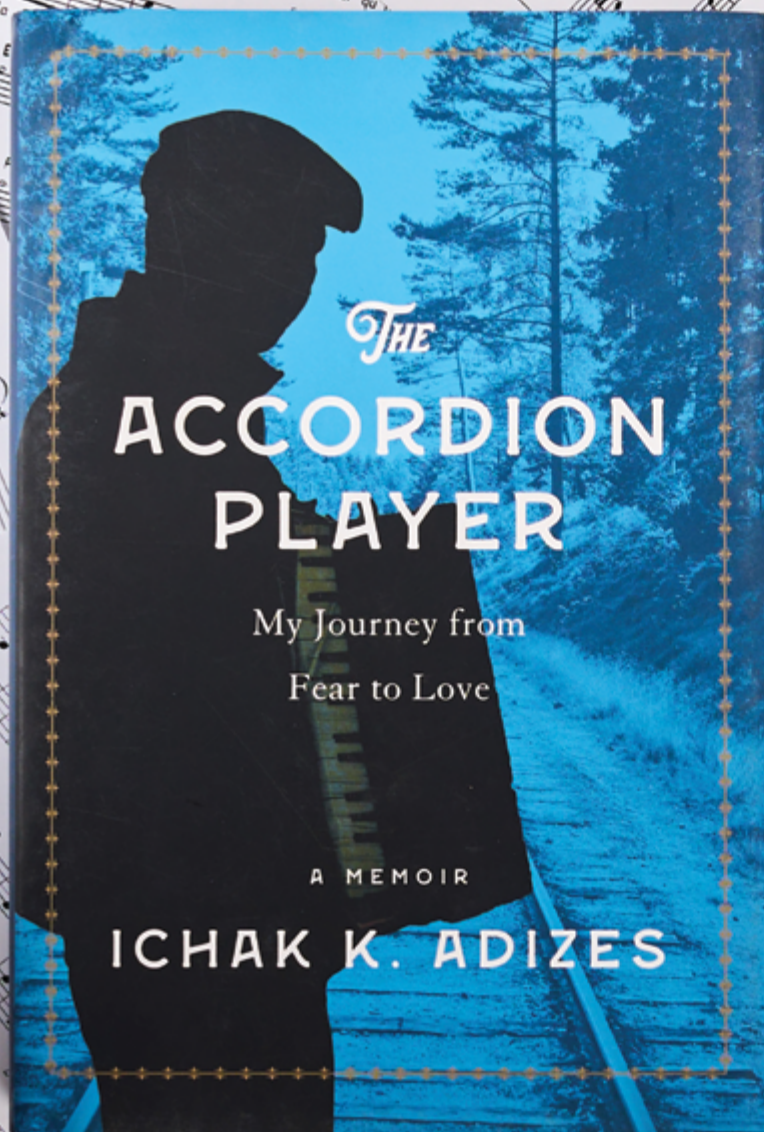
Dr. Adizes's personal story is more than a string of external events that propelled him through adversity after adversity to become the insightful, compassionate person he is today. It is also a map of his journey into a heart which, like the accordion that he played to earn a living and put himself through school, ultimately expanded and opened up to the universal truths that connect us all in our humanity.

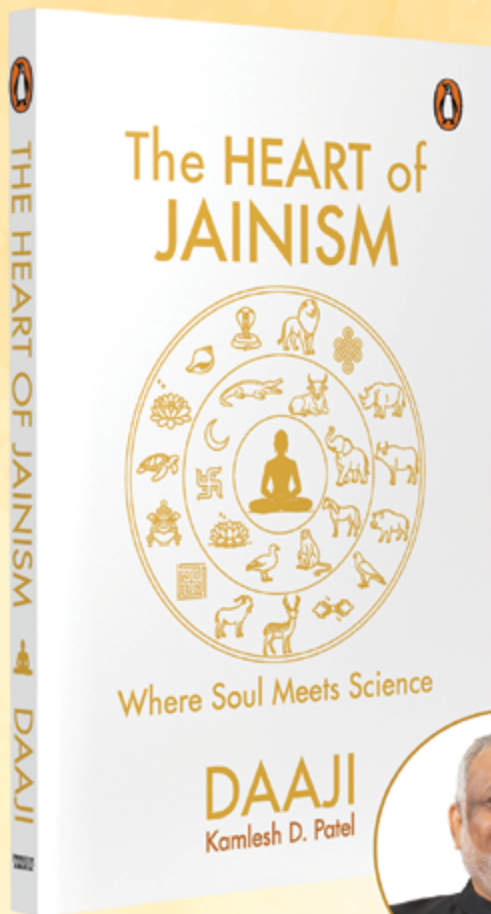
The Accordion Player is a compelling account of a remarkable life — an unvarnished view of a man whose decision to recognize the value of change and creative conflict allowed him to love. His story reveals the enduring human ability to turn possibility into reality.

Foreword by Daaji

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Flow

Dear readers,

The flow state, or “being in the zone,” is an experience of complete absorption in an activity, when we lose track of time and ourselves. In ordinary experience, it comes and goes.

In “Sustained Samadhi: Life in a Flow State,” Daaji takes up this experience from a yogic perspective. He presents a state that is usually temporary and situational as something that can be deep and enduring—not an exceptional moment entered and lost, but a condition lived through the activities of daily life.

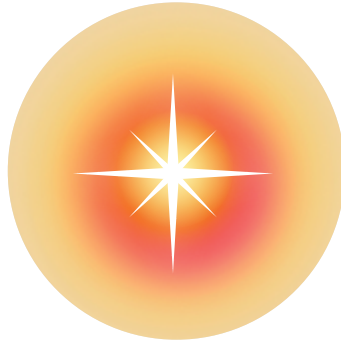
In “The Flow of Life,” Elizabeth Denley turns from the flow state to the flow of life itself. Movement, she writes, is not incidental to life; it is life’s nature, even at the level of the soul. Suffering begins when we resist that movement. Like a raindrop joining the river, we are meant to continue. It is separation that brings struggle.

And in “Marlo and the Winding River,” younger readers meet the same insight through story. A small otter is certain that the way through the rapids is to paddle as hard as he can. The river teaches him otherwise.

We welcome your reflections, experiences, and other submissions. Please visit heartfulness.org/magazine/ contribute or scan the QR code below.

Happy reading,
The editors





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DAAJI

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practice

“Every day is a golden opportunity
to design our own destiny.”

DAAJI



Sankalpa

AND THE POWER OF SUBTLETY

This second article on sankalpa, part of the SACRED Principles of Practice series, explores how the inner method of spiritual change becomes more potent as it becomes subtler, revealing a universal principle of spiritual growth and transformation.

BY N.S. NAGARAJA AND JOSHUA POLLOCK

In Part One, we introduced *sankalpa*—the inner method of spiritual change. We form sankalpa inwardly, by gathering thought, intention, and will into a prayerful suggestion for change, while leaving its fulfillment to Divine Will. The individual does not manage the manner, timing, visible form, or scope of that fulfillment.

Once formed, some sankalpas appear to manifest swiftly, with clear and visible impact, while others unfold gradually over time. In some cases, they bring about deep, lasting transformation; in others, they produce only temporary, surface-level change.

It is easy to assume these variations are a simple matter of feasibility—after all, a surface-level change seems easier to achieve than a deep transformation. From the standpoint of divine power, however, feasibility is not the determining question. A sankalpa's fulfillment, rather, depends largely on the *subtlety* with which it is formed and offered.

To understand the subtlety of a sankalpa, let us first examine its opposite, which is forcefulness. Daaji emphasizes that we cannot create transformation through the imposition of our will, which he calls “a type of violence.” “What happens when you rely on force to produce change in another person?” he asks. “You only create resistance. Even if the person complies with your wishes, it is only on the surface. Your efforts have not produced true change. A far better approach is to elicit willing cooperation. You can politely request, ‘Please do this.’ Or, like Pujya Babuji [Ram Chandra of Shahjahanpur], you can be quite indirect about it, and say, ‘It would be wonderful if this thing were to be done.’ That approach creates even fewer ripples. The subtlest approach, however, is to say not a word, but instead, to prayerfully and silently submit, ‘may it happen like this.’ Forming such a subtle will—and then prayerfully submitting that subtle will to the Lord, devoid of all attachment and insistence—is by far the most potent type of suggestion.”¹

This silent, prayerful submission is the beginning of sankalpa in its true sense. From there, Babuji described three degrees of subtlety *within* sankalpa: subtle, subtler, and subtlest. If a sankalpa is subtler, the result does not take long; if it is subtlest,² the result is immediate.

The subtlety of sankalpa *depends on the condition of the one who forms it*. As a person's condition becomes more subtle, their sankalpa becomes more subtle, and its effect becomes more potent.

Indian thought describes the gunas (*sattva, rajas, and tamas*), which are the essential conditions through which nature expresses itself. These gunas serve as useful reference points for understanding the variations in our inner condition. A subtle inner condition may be understood as sattvik, while grosser conditions may be rajasic or tamasic. The effective formation of sankalpa depends on a subtle, sattvik condition. That is why, in Heartfulness, a new seeker receives the support of a trainer, who helps create the inner conditions in which subtler states can gradually develop.

A subtle condition can be recognized by many signs: resilience, inner lightness, contentment, peace, clarity, compassion, and courage, among other qualities. A grosser condition manifests as heavier states such as desire, restlessness, anger, fear, and confusion.

Yet these are signs, not the root. At the root lies the presence or absence of the sense of self. Patanjali calls this *asmita*, the feeling of “I-am-ness,” commonly described as ego. When this same sense of self appears in relation to action as the feeling that “I am the doer,” it is called *ahankara*, the sense of “I do” or “I make.” Hence, egoism does not simply mean vanity or pride. Rather, it is the inner claim of authorship: “I am doing this. I am the one acting. I am the one producing the result.”





The subtlety of sankalpa depends on the condition of the one who forms it. As a person's condition becomes more subtle, their sankalpa becomes more subtle, and its effect becomes more potent.

Babuji describes a series of stages of egoism through which we progress on the spiritual path.³ In the cruder stages, a person feels that their body is the doer. One's attention remains fixed at the physical level, not seeing beyond the body as the agent of action.

As the condition becomes finer, the sense of agency shifts inward. The person may now feel that the soul, the mind, God, the guru, or some other inward agency is the doer, while the body is only an instrument. The idea of the physical body as the doer has receded, but the idea of a doer still remains. This marks the beginning of subtlety.

A further refinement comes when even this idea of agency begins to disappear. Work is being done, but the person no longer feels that it is being done by the body, the mind, or any other identifiable agent. As a result, the questions "Who is doing?" and "Through what agency?" do not arise.

At the subtlest stage, even the awareness that work is being done disappears. Action continues as needed, but there is no idea of the action before, during, or afterward.

To illustrate this subtlest stage, Babuji gives the example of a sleeping person bitten by an insect. Their hand automatically goes to that part of the body and scratches it as needed. Yet the person remains asleep. They have no idea of the action, whether before, during, or afterward, and when they wake, they do not remember it. Babuji calls this “the sleeping state in the waking condition”: one goes on doing everything as circumstances demand, without any idea of the work or its doer.⁴

In such a condition, the person functions as an instrument of Nature, and divine work proceeds through them automatically. Such action is not mechanical or unconscious in the ordinary sense; rather, it is free from the self-conscious doer. In this condition, sankalpa reaches its subtlest state, and its potency is absolute.

Seen in this light, Babuji’s three degrees of sankalpa—subtle, subtler, and subtlest—become easier to distinguish.

A subtle condition can be recognized by many signs: resilience, inner lightness, contentment, peace, clarity, compassion, and courage, among many others. A grosser condition manifests as heavier states such as desire, restlessness, anger, fear, and confusion.

A subtle sankalpa is formed and offered with conscious deliberation. The conscious self remains present in the act, and there remains a feeling that “I am offering this sankalpa.” This presence of self lends what Babuji calls “slight weight” to the sankalpa.⁵ In addition, the involvement of the self creates a risk that the sankalpa may be fabricated by the intellect or arise from imagination [*vikalpa*] rather than from a true perception of need.

In *vikalpa*, the mind forms an image, idea, or possibility of its own creation. In *pratibha*, however, spontaneous visionary insight descends from the superconscious, without the involvement of discursive thought. When forming sankalpa of the subtler variety, one tends to perceive the result as already real, though in potential or seed form. The situation is comparable to a sculptor who views a block of stone and sees the form of a statue already present within it. The statue is not yet outwardly manifest, but to the sculptor’s eye it is already there, waiting only to be revealed.

Pratibha is not the mind inventing a result, but a direct perception of what is already present in potential. Sankhya philosophy expresses this through the principle that the effect is already present in the cause, as oil is present in the seed before it is pressed. Pressing does not create the oil; it reveals what the seed already contains. In the same way, sankalpa does not imagine a result and then try to make that real. Instead, it perceives what is latent, and through that seeing, allows it to reveal itself.

Even before we have developed the capacity of *pratibha*, we follow the same principle when offering a sankalpa, forming the thought that “the work has already been done”—that is, treating the result as already present in seed form.⁶ Initially, this is held as an attitude; later, it begins to appear as perception.



However, perception is not synonymous with manifestation. The movement from potential toward expression belongs to *bhavana*, the yogic capacity by which contemplation calls a thing into existence. The individual remains a mere witness to what is present in potential. And in that witnessing, the potential begins to express itself.

At the subtlest level, even witnessing falls away. The person is not standing apart, seeing the potential and allowing it to manifest. As in Babuji's example of the sleeping state in the waking condition, action arises without the idea of action before, during, or afterward. Sankalpa at this level is automatic—divine work efficiently proceeding through a prepared instrument, without any involvement of the mind or intellect.

The fundamental difference among these three levels lies in the degree to which the self remains involved. In the subtle sankalpa, the self formulates, thereby limiting the result. In

the subtler sankalpa, the self witnesses, and the result is less impeded by the self's activity. In the subtlest sankalpa, the witness dissolves, and the work proceeds automatically and unhindered.

This relation between subtlety and selfhood also clarifies why sankalpa cannot be misused for self-interested goals. Selfishness belongs to the self—the sense of “I” and “mine” that gives rise to fear and desire. Such motives may have psychological force, but they lack the subtlety that gives sankalpa its potency. This forms a natural protection against misuse: a selfish sankalpa lacks subtlety and therefore loses potency. As the self-conscious doer recedes, so does the basis for selfish motive. At the subtlest level, where divine work flows unencumbered, a selfish sankalpa cannot arise.

As we explored in Part One, sankalpa is the inner method by which thought and intention are gathered into a single prayerful suggestion

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and consigned to Divine Will. In doing so, the individual uses thought and intention to transcend dependence on both.

This raises a deeper question. If spiritual evolution ultimately leads to a condition in which the self-conscious doer has dissolved and divine work proceeds without personal involvement, what remains for the human being to contribute? Babuji answers:

"I may also bring to light another mystery. We have been saying out of devotion that there is providence in the fall of a sparrow and not a leaf trembles without the Divine Will. And that is a fact too. But if I say that God too does not move without the will of his devotee, I do not know what the wisecracks of saints might think of me. But that is a fact beyond doubt, and a fact must be declared in order to reveal reality."⁷

Babuji's words leave us with an apparent paradox: even as personal doership dissolves, the devotee's will remains essential.

The final part of this series will return to the practical method and applications of sankalpa. But is sankalpa truly a method at all? That question will lead us beyond technique, toward the mind's higher function.

FROM HEARTFULNESS INSTITUTE

The Heartfulness Institute is a global not-for-profit offering heart-based meditation, a yogic practice for inner well-being and collective harmony.

heartfulness.org/global/



¹ Kamlesh Patel (Daaji), "Invoke the Highest," message on the occasion of the 148th birth anniversary of Lalaji Maharaj, Daaji.org, daaji.org/daaji-messages/invoke-the-highest.

² Parthasarathi Rajagopalachari, *What is Sahaj Marg? A Preceptor's Guide*, Vol. II, First Electronic Edition (Shri Ram Chandra Mission, 2005), 29–30.

³ Ram Chandra, "Central Region," in *Efficacy of Raja Yoga in the Light of Sahaj Marg*, in *Complete Works of Ram Chandra*, Vol. I, 5th reprint (Chennai: Shri Ram Chandra Mission / Spiritual Hierarchy Publication Trust, 2009), 153–155.

⁴ Ram Chandra, "Central Region," 154–155.

⁵ Rajagopalachari, *Preceptor's Guide*, Vol. II, 31.

⁶ Rajagopalachari, *Preceptor's Guide*, Vol. II, 52.

⁷ Ram Chandra, "The Final State," in *Towards Infinity*, in *Complete Works of Ram Chandra*, Vol. I, 5th reprint (Chennai: Shri Ram Chandra Mission / Spiritual Hierarchy Publication Trust, 2009), 276.

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“The only true wisdom is in knowing
you know nothing.”

SOCRATES

Sustained Samadhi:

Life in a Flow State

A yogic look at the flow state, showing how meditation can carry absorption beyond rare peak moments and into the steady current of daily life.

BY DAAJI

तत्र प्रत्ययैकतानता ध्यानम्
tatra pratyayaikatānatā dhyānam

The smooth, unbroken flow of the mind toward the chosen object of focus is called meditation.

—Yoga Sutra 3.2

There is a kind of experience that most people have known at least once in their lives. It is a moment when time seems to dissolve, when the self becomes transparent, when action flows from some source deeper and wiser than the thinking mind. Athletes call it “being in the zone.” Artists describe it as a creative trance. Scientists refer to a state of pure concentration from which sudden insight emerges. And, in recent decades, theorists have given it a name: the flow state.

What is remarkable about this phenomenon, which contemporary psychology treats as something extraordinary, is that our great yogic tradition has known about it for thousands of years. Not only has it been described in precise detail, but a method has also been developed to cultivate it as a permanent way of life rather than a fleeting visitation. Heartfulness has refined this method over the generations and made it accessible to all.

The name for this living flow state in our tradition is *turiyatit*. And the path that leads to it passes through what Patanjali called *dhyana*, through what Ram

Chandra of Shahjahanpur [Babuji] called *Sabaj Samadhi*, and through the practice of Constant Remembrance. Together, these open into something that the Bhagavad Gita distills into just three words:

योगः कर्मसु कौशलम्
yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam

Through Yoga, excellence in all action.

—Bhagavad Gita 2.50

Turiya: Continuous Flow in Daily Life

Turiyatit from Turiya

Turiya, spoken of in the Mandukya Upanishad as the fourth state of consciousness beyond waking, dreaming, and deep sleep, is a condition of absorbed, restful consciousness, settled and inwardly continuous with the Source. In meditation, one may touch this state when the mind is no longer pulled by memory, imagination, or anticipation.

Turiyatit means “beyond *turiya*.” It is the natural extension of that inner condition into daily life. The meditative state steps out into the open: eyes open, hands busy, fully present in the world, yet inwardly continuous with the Source. The mind remains restful, not chasing things, not anticipating future problems, not carrying the weight of the past. One is simply, completely, in the moment.

Turiyatit means “beyond *turiya*.” It is the natural extension of that inner condition into daily life. The meditative state steps out into the open: eyes open, hands busy, fully present in the world, yet inwardly continuous with the Source.

In Heartfulness, this happens very naturally. The love for the Master becomes so all-pervading that every task is naturally held within it. You continue doing your work as if offering it to him as *prasada*. Every act in the day becomes an offering; each action becomes an act of reverence, not because we label it so, but because it arises from that place of devotion. And when we live this way, the mind finds no reason to be disturbed. It simply cooperates, quietly and peacefully, with whatever the moment asks.

The *turiya* condition is available even to someone meditating for the first time. If we are careful to maintain that inner condition after meditation by prolonging it and nurturing it, it gradually becomes *turiyatit*: moving through life with a cool, steady, eyes-open flow.

Akarma: Egoless Action

Lord Krishna classifies actions in the Gita into three categories: *karma*, *vikarma*, and *akarma*. *Karma* is action. *Vikarma* is action performed with love, a love that thereby transforms it. *Akarma* is what emerges when both are transcended: not the absence of action, nor the absence of love, but a state that contains both and yet is identified with neither. It is the algebraic sum, so to speak, of action and love-filled action—arriving somewhere beyond both.

A mother wakes in the middle of the night because her baby is crying. She feeds the baby and goes back to bed. A few days later, she falls ill. She wakes her husband. “The baby is crying, please warm up the milk and feed the baby.” He gets up and does it. But he keeps it in his memory: “I did this for you when you were not well.” He will remind everyone without fail. The mother acts purely out of love, to the extent that she is not even aware of what she has done. The husband remembers it all his life. His action, without the quality of love, remains *karma*. Hers, absorbed entirely in love, has become *vikarma*. But notice—a person who keeps saying “I did this out of love” is not truly acting from love. People with real love will never do this.



There comes a time when even the idea of love disappears from the equation, though it is very much present behind the scenes. At that point, you neither remember the action nor the love behind it. That is akarma: action performed with pure love but completely without attachment. It is the ideal condition for a spiritual aspirant.

In Sahaj Marg, akarma is not a peak experience that comes to us only occasionally. It is a state of being that can be developed, stabilized, and ultimately lived continuously—not through a change in external circumstance, but through interior transformation. Through the mechanics of meditation, cleaning, and Constant Remembrance, the ego structure is progressively refined until akarma is no longer exceptional. It becomes the ordinary texture of daily life.

Karma is action. Vikarma is action performed with love, a love that thereby transforms it. Akarma is what emerges when both are transcended: not the absence of action, nor the absence of love, but a state that contains both and yet is identified with neither.

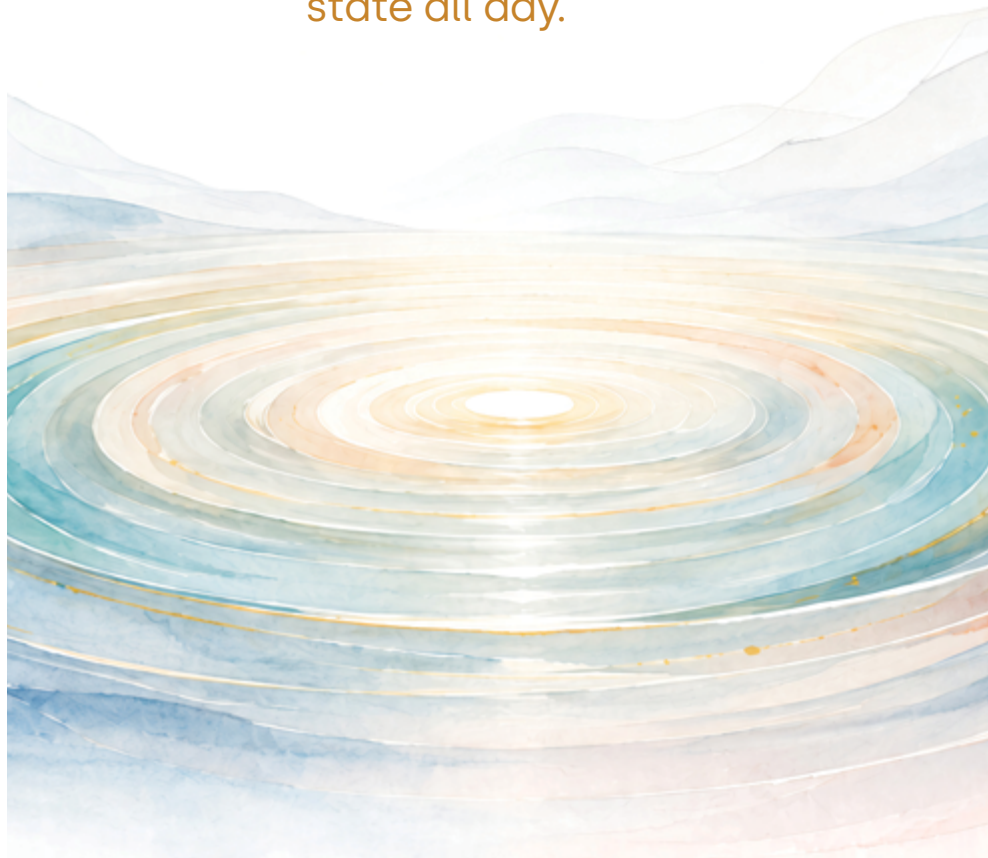
Dharana: Effortless Effort

Constant Remembrance

Every morning in meditation, we create a meditative state to carry out into the day. Each evening, through cleaning, we create a state of purity to carry within us. And each time we pray, we create a prayerful state in the heart, staying connected to the Source, vacuumized and receptive. When we retain and nurture these three states throughout the day, we keep the top of our inner condition spinning, creating a beautiful balance. This practice is known as Constant Remembrance, and when we hold it throughout the day, we not only stop the formation of samskaras but also naturally develop the capacity for Sahaj Samadhi.

This is the practice that sustains the flow state through every hour of daily life. When we are truly absorbed in the presence of the Divine, we think and act without creating new imprints on our consciousness, sustaining our flow state all day.

When we are truly absorbed in the presence of the Divine, we think and act without creating new imprints on our consciousness, sustaining our flow state all day.



Effortless Effort

Dharana results in concentration because there is an unbroken flow toward one thing that is contained and nurtured in the heart. There is some effort involved in the process of *sankalpa*, directing the flow of thought, but the ideal is to cultivate a capacity for effortless effort. This guides our consciousness into the current flowing inward to the Source, moving us toward complete oneness with the Divine Principle.

And effortlessness is not the only ideal. It is, essentially, the natural state. In meditation, it must become effortless. In cleaning, eventually, even before we make a sankalpa, the cleaning begins on its own. In Constant Remembrance, initially, there is effort, but afterward it becomes natural. The key that opens the door to miracles and Grace is effortlessness.

When we sincerely take up the goal of becoming one with the Ultimate, the centripetal flow creates a stir in the Infinite. Divinity itself becomes convinced of our one-pointedness of purpose, our earnest intent. And then at this point, it is no longer simply “me” moving toward the goal. The dynamic changes to that of a lover and the Beloved, where attraction flows from both sides, and the distance between them grows less and less.

The Transmission we receive in each meditation session facilitates this effortless inward focus because it comes from the Source itself. It turns our attention naturally deep within, placing us in osmosis with the most sublime samadhi from the very beginning. The traditional texts describe true dhyana as a steady, uninterrupted flow, like oil poured in a continuous stream, or a smooth river moving into the ocean. Patanjali’s sutra shows it as the natural progression from dharana, where concentration requires effort and can be broken. Dhyana is what happens when that focus becomes seamless and self-sustaining.

Samadhi: The Ultimate Absorption

Sahaj Samadhi

Samadhi, the ultimate state of spiritual relaxation and effortless concentration, is considered the pinnacle of the human experience in Yoga. It is the reason we turn all our faculties inward and meditate. In the Heartfulness tradition, this destination is called Sahaj Samadhi: a state in which the individual exists at a stage of consciousness that may be described as superhuman, yet the lower mind remains aware of everything going on around it without being affected by the environment in any way. One may remain busy with work, the conscious mind absorbed in external activity, while in the innermost core of the heart, there is an unbroken settledness in the Real. The subconscious mind remains occupied with divine thoughts. Samadhi is all-pervasive, even as one appears to be fully engaged in worldly life. This is the highest form of samadhi, and little remains to be done after a person has entered this state permanently.

Samadhi, the ultimate state of spiritual relaxation and effortless concentration, is considered the pinnacle of the human experience in Yoga. It is the reason we turn all our faculties inward and meditate.

When we learn to take this condition into our day, we become able to focus simultaneously on work, on our surroundings, on whatever is happening around us, and yet remain in communion with our inner spiritual state. We are peaceful, witnessing all things at once, a 360-degree consciousness with eyes open. There is no need to focus on any particular thing, because the moment we do, it is no longer meditation but concentration.

Transmission, Pranahuti, is what makes this journey available from the very beginning. Because it comes from the Source itself, it naturally turns our attention deep within and places us in osmosis with the most sublime samadhi long before we could arrive there through effort alone. And as consciousness expands through this practice, inspiration follows naturally, much as most great scientific discoveries have occurred and most artistic masterpieces have been created.



The Flow of Grace

Pranahuti carries us effortlessly to the depths of samadhi we would not otherwise reach so easily or so quickly. Babuji understood that Grace flows the way everything in nature flows—from a higher level to a lower one, drawn by a difference in polarity. When we create a state of inner vacancy through prayer, the flow of Grace becomes imminent. Love fills our being the moment we create that quality of supplication within ourselves. In its real sense, which most of us have overlooked, this is what prayer is at its deepest: not so much a petition as a connection, the opening of a channel through which Transmission flows and gradually establishes a state of osmosis between soul and Source, the way a cell draws nourishment through its walls simply by maintaining the right inner conditions.

Thus, the practices hold together as one living system. Morning meditation, evening cleaning, the state of Constant Remembrance, the receptive stillness of Pranahuti—each one prepares the heart to receive, and each one deepens the capacity of the next. Through them, what begins as effort becomes ease, what begins as a practice becomes a presence, and what begins as a glimpse of samadhi gradually opens into something without limit or end.

May we all experience subtler and subtler states of samadhi through the practice of meditation, until one day we find ourselves swimming in the infinite ocean while living a full and joyful human life. That swimming, it should be said, is endless in nature. There is no final shore to reach, no moment at which the journey concludes. There is only going deeper, opening wider, becoming more naturally and completely what we have always, in our truest nature, already been.

तस्य प्रशान्तवाहिता संस्कारात्
tasya prasāntavāhitā saṁskārāt

The potent flow of this state is maintained by creating the habit of practicing day after day.

—Yoga Sutra 3.10

FROM DAAJI

Daaji is the Heartfulness Guide and president of Shri Ram Chandra Mission.

daaji.org



When we create a state of inner vacancy through prayer, the flow of Grace becomes imminent. Love fills our being the moment we create that quality of supplication within ourselves.

research

“Science is not just a body of
knowledge; it is a way of thinking.”

CARL SAGAN



From Inspiration to Evidence:

Evaluating What Truly Supports Student Well-Being

How a Heartfulness for Schools elective used classroom practice, student reflection, and formal assessment to show the value of measuring impact in educational programs.

BY [RANJANI IYER](#)

The most meaningful educational initiatives are those that go beyond inspiration and aim to create a measurable impact on students' lives. Doing so requires the willingness to ask a deeper question:

Is this initiative truly making a difference, and what evidence supports that conclusion?

As schools increasingly invest time, resources, and trust in social-emotional learning (SEL) and well-being initiatives, the need for evidence-based practice has become essential. Programs designed to support emotional resilience, stress management, empathy, attention, and overall well-being must also demonstrate their impact through meaningful data and research.

When the Heartfulness for Schools initiative began in 2016, this understanding was already central to our conversations. We brought together an extraordinary group of experienced educators, school leaders, counselors, and practitioners who recognized a growing challenge in modern education: while schools were successfully developing academic intelligence, many students continued to struggle emotionally, socially, and psychologically. There was increasing recognition that education could no longer focus exclusively on academic achievement. Students needed support in developing self-awareness, emotional regulation, resilience, empathy, and inner balance alongside intellectual growth.



During the early years of the program, I designed and taught a semester-long elective titled *Calm in the Midst of Chaos: Relaxation in a Stressful World*. The course emerged from a simple observation: students were living in environments of constant stimulation, pressure, competition, distraction, and stress, yet very few had been taught practical tools to regulate their emotions and mental states.

Each of the 12 lessons began with a simple three-minute relaxation practice. Students were introduced to tools developed by the Heartfulness Institute, including relaxation techniques, breathing exercises, and affirmations. However, the course was not designed as a passive wellness experience. It was intentionally experiential, collaborative, and creative. Students worked together to imagine and design stress-

free environments through brainstorming, sketching, prototyping, planning, testing, digital tools, paintings, and artifacts. They learned to collaborate creatively, troubleshoot challenges, revise ideas, and reflect on their emotional experiences throughout the process. At the end of the course, students presented their projects along with evaluations of their design process and learning.

What made this experience particularly meaningful was that the school and participating students agreed to evaluate the elective's impact through formal pre- and post-program assessments using two validated instruments: the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), which measures perceived stress, and the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS), which assesses positive mental well-being.





When students are given intentional opportunities to pause, reflect, regulate their emotions, and connect with themselves, the effects can extend beyond stress reduction. Students often become more attentive, collaborative, emotionally balanced, and open to learning itself.



PSS

Perceived Stress
Scale

Measures
perceived stress



WEMWBS

Warwick-
Edinburgh Mental
Wellbeing Scale

Assesses positive
mental well-being

This step was important because well-being programs in education are too often implemented without sufficient evaluation. Educators may observe anecdotal improvements, but without systematic assessment, it becomes difficult to understand what is truly working, for whom, and under what conditions. Data allows programs to move beyond intuition toward evidence-informed practice.

The findings from the study were encouraging. The research, later published in the peer-reviewed and PubMed-indexed American Journal of Health Behavior, demonstrated measurable improvements in student well-being and reductions in perceived stress following participation in the course.

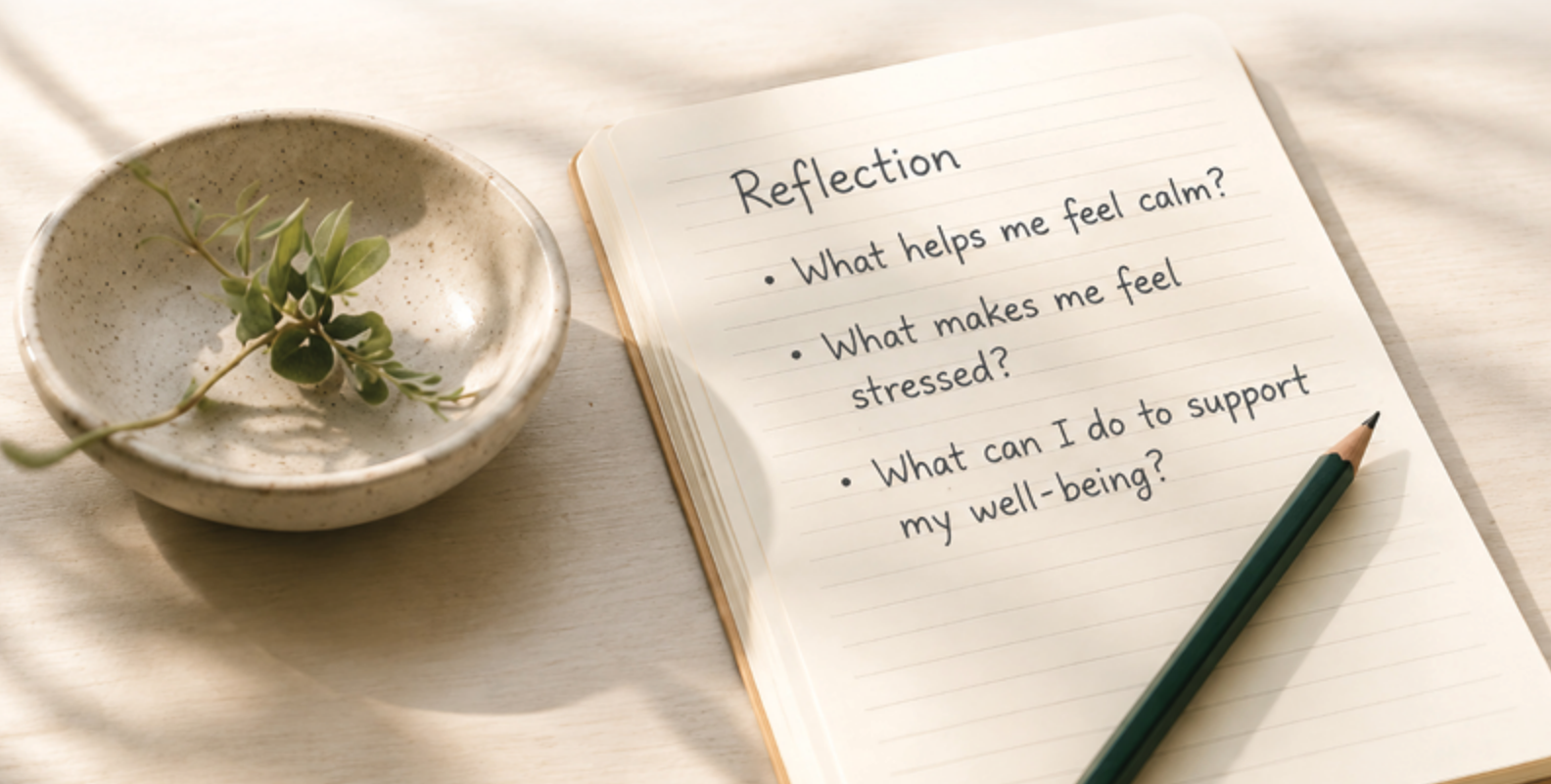
RESEARCH

Beyond the numerical outcomes, the evaluation reinforced what many educators intuitively recognize: when students are given intentional opportunities to pause, reflect, regulate their emotions, and connect with themselves, the effects can extend beyond stress reduction. Students often become more attentive, collaborative, emotionally balanced, and open to learning itself.

The publication of the study represented more than academic validation. It demonstrated that contemplative and social-emotional approaches could be evaluated rigorously in educational settings using established research tools and measurable outcomes. This evidence also contributed to the Heartfulness program's inclusion in the evidence-based SEL program pool recognized by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), a leading organization advancing social-emotional learning worldwide.

Yet perhaps the most important lesson from this journey was not simply that the program showed positive outcomes. It was the realization that research itself can play a transformative role in education. When schools and organizations commit to carefully studying impact, they create opportunities for continuous improvement, deeper understanding, and greater educational credibility. Research helps educators refine practices, identify meaningful outcomes, better understand student needs, and build confidence among school leaders, families, and policymakers. Most importantly, evidence-based inquiry creates a culture of reflection rather than assumption.

The early research on Heartfulness for Schools did not become an endpoint. Instead, it became the beginning of a larger inquiry. Those initial findings opened pathways for further studies exploring the impact of Heartfulness practices on stress, loneliness, emotional well-being, quality of life, attention, and overall student development across diverse educational contexts.





As educators and school leaders continue exploring approaches that support student well-being, several lessons emerge from this journey. Good intentions alone are not enough; programs designed to support students must also be evaluated through meaningful evidence and measurable impact. Academic intelligence and emotional intelligence cannot be separated if schools truly hope to prepare students for the complexities of modern life. Even small intentional practices such as relaxation, reflective pauses, and emotionally safe classrooms can meaningfully influence how students learn, collaborate, and respond to stress.

Research plays an essential role in strengthening educational innovation by helping schools move from assumptions to evidence-informed practice while refining programs based on real student needs. Finally, the future of education may depend on our ability to nurture students who are not only knowledgeable but also compassionate, resilient, self-aware, and emotionally balanced individuals.

Lasting transformation in education begins when we are willing to continually learn from the students we seek to serve. This is how meaningful educational change grows—not simply through inspiring ideas, but through thoughtful practice, careful observation, and evidence-based reflection.

FROM HEARTFULNESS RESEARCH

Heartfulness Research studies the effects of meditation from both neuroscientific and qualitative perspectives.

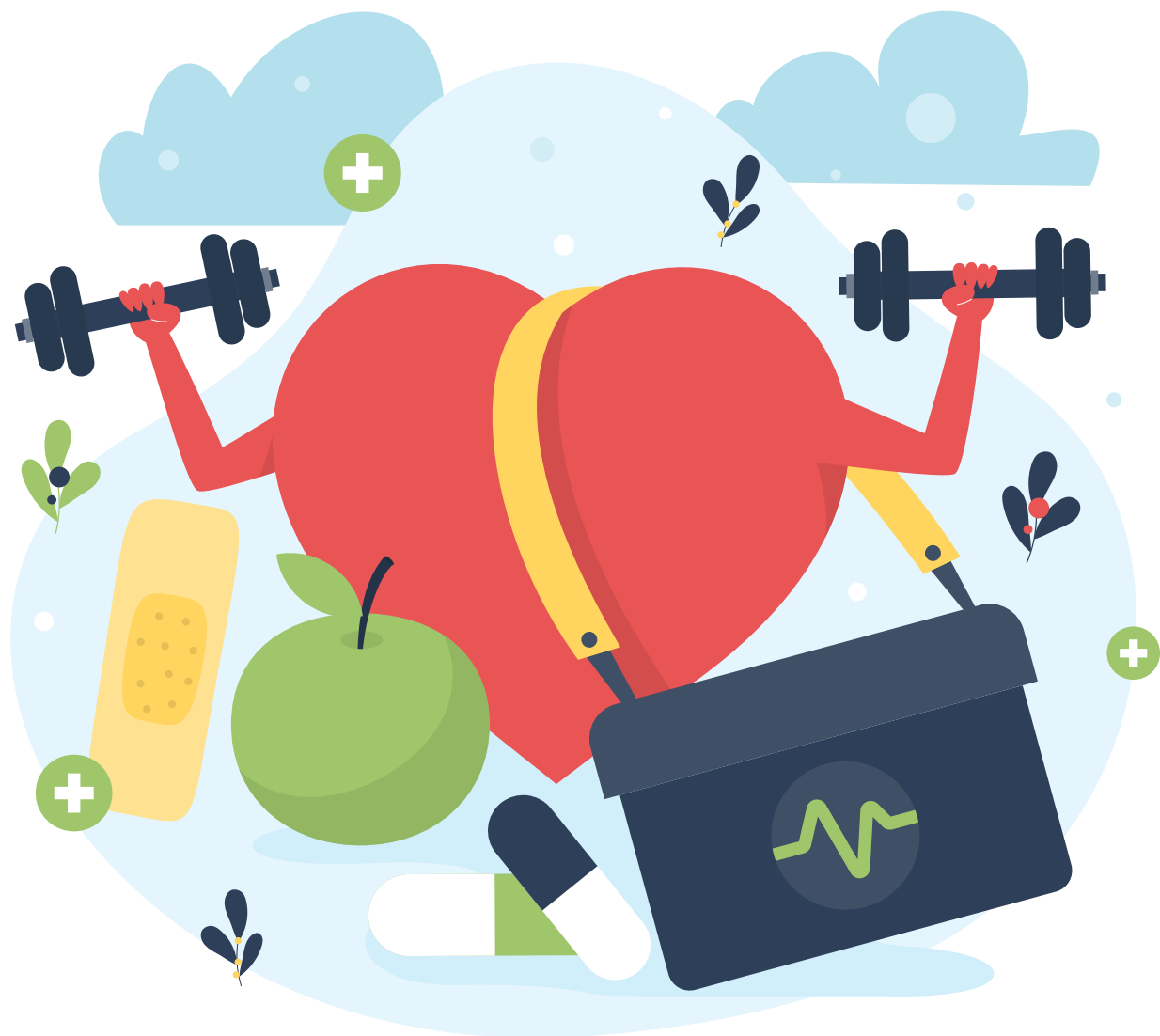
heartfulnessinstitute.org/research/



wellness

“Health is the greatest gift,
contentment the greatest wealth,
faithfulness the best relationship.”

BUDDHA



LIVING YOUR YOGA

The Inner Tradition Beyond the Mat

A reflection on Yoga as a way of conscious living, where breath, ethics, self-study, and ordinary daily actions become part of the path of inner transformation.

BY **BHUSHAN BHUKTE**



Walk into almost any yoga studio today, and you will find people stretching, strengthening, and breathing—emerging calmer, lighter, more at ease. These are real gifts, and they matter. But they are only the beginning of what Yoga truly is.

The inner tradition of Yoga points to something far more expansive: a way of living that does not begin or end on the mat. It is not a practice we pick up and put down. It is, as the ancient teachers understood, a conscious art of being—one that quietly transforms every corner of our daily life.

At its heart, Yoga is the movement from *vikshepa*—the fragmented, restless, distracted mind—toward wholeness, inner stillness, and awakened awareness. That shift does not happen only during an hour of asana. It happens in the kitchen, at the office, in traffic, and in the middle of a difficult conversation. It happens, or it doesn't, in the way we live.

व्याधिस्त्यानसंशयप्रमादालस्याविरतिभ्रान्तिदर्शनालब्धभूमिक
त्वानवस्थितत्वानि चित्तविक्षेपास्तेऽन्तरायाः
*vyādhi-styāna-saṁśaya-pramāda-ālaya-
avirati-bhrānti-darśana-alabdha-bhūmikatva-
anavasthitatvāni citta-vikṣepāḥ te antarāyāḥ*

Disease, mental stagnation, doubt, carelessness, laziness, inability to withdraw from sensory indulgence, false perception, failure to reach the intended stage of practice, and instability in

sustaining a stage once reached—these are the distractions of the mind [*citta-vikṣepa*] and the obstacles [*antarāya*] on the path of Yoga.

—Yoga Sutra 1.30

दुःखदौर्मनस्याङ्गमेजयत्वश्वासप्रश्वासा विक्षेपसहभुवः
*duḥkha-daurmanasya-aṅgamejayatva-śvāsa-
praśvāsāḥ vikṣepa-sahabhuvāḥ*

Pain [*duḥkha*], mental distress, and despondency [*daurmanasya*], bodily restlessness and tremor [*aṅgamejayatva*], and irregular inhalation and exhalation [*śvāsa-praśvāsa*] are the companions of these mental distractions.

—Yoga Sutra 1.31

Yoga as a Culture of the Self

One of the most beautiful teachings from Daaji is that human life is not merely a biological fact—it is a sacred opportunity for conscious evolution. Yoga, in this light, becomes a form of self-culturing: a steady, patient refinement of how we think, feel, and act.

विशोका वा ज्योतिष्मती
viśokā vā jyotiṣmatī

Steadiness of the mind may also be attained [by meditating upon] the inner radiant luminosity that is free from sorrow.

—Yoga Sutra 1.36

This tradition rests on three interwoven pillars:

- **Inner transformation over physicality:** While physical well-being matters deeply, the deeper purpose of Yoga is to cleanse the subtle body of the samskaras, the accumulated impressions and impurities that shape our unconscious patterns.
- ***Svadhyaya* [self-observation]:** Regular, honest self-study allows us to see our habits, emotional tendencies, and behavioral patterns with clarity and compassion, rather than judgment.
- **Conscious evolution:** By gently turning our attention from outer distraction toward inner refinement, Yoga becomes a continuous, living practice—a round-the-clock orientation to life rather than a scheduled event.

Yogic science, in this sense, is the art of quieting the subconscious mind and integrating the whole personality. Its deepest aim is *citta prasadanam*—mental serenity—and *samatvam*, the equanimity that remains stable even in the face of life’s inevitable ups and downs.

मैत्रीकरुणामुदितोपेक्षाणां सुखदुःखपुण्यापुण्यविषयाणां
भावनातश्चित्तप्रसादनम्
*maitrī-karuṇā-mudita-apekṣāṇāṃ sukha-
duḥkha-puṇya-apuṇya-viśayaṇāṃ bhāvanātaḥ
citta-prasādanam*

The mind attains clarity and serenity [*citta-prasādanam*] by cultivating friendliness toward those who are happy, compassion toward those who suffer, sympathetic joy toward those who are virtuous, and equanimity toward those engaged in non-virtuous actions.

—**Yoga Sutra 1.33**



GOMUKHASANA

Practice: *Gomukhasana*

Gomukhasana encourages balanced posture, openness through the chest and shoulders, and steady self-awareness. It reminds us that Yoga is a process of harmonizing the body and mind through patient self-cultivation.

Skill in Action: Yoga Beyond the Mat

बुद्धियुक्तो जहातीह उभे सुकृतदुष्कृते । तस्माद्योगाय युज्यस्व
योगः कर्मसु कौशलम् ॥

*buddhi-yukto jahātīha ubhe sukrta-duṣkṛte
| tasmād yogāya yujyasva yogaḥ karmasu
kauśalam ||*

One who acts with wisdom [*buddhi*] transcends both good and bad acts in this very life.

Therefore, devote yourself wholly to Yoga—for Yoga is excellence and skillfulness in action.

—**Bhagavad Gita 2.50**

The Bhagavad Gita offers one of the most grounded definitions of Yoga: not a pose, not a breathing technique, but skill in action. Every act, when performed with awareness, sincerity, and freedom from ego, becomes an expression of Yoga.

This means that Yoga must show up in the texture of ordinary life—not as a performance, but as a natural quality of presence. Consider how differently we might move through the day if we approached each of these as part of our practice:

- **How we speak:** Are our words considered, kind, and honest?
- **How we eat:** Are we nourishing ourselves with awareness, or consuming unconsciously?
- **How we respond to stress:** Do we react from habit, or pause and respond with steadiness?
- **How we treat others:** Are our interactions rooted in patience and genuine care?
- **How we direct our thoughts:** Are we feeding clarity and compassion, or rumination and agitation?

A sincere Yoga practitioner cannot spend one hour in quiet awareness and then live the remaining 23

hours unconsciously. True Yoga asks for integrity—a seamless thread of awareness running through all of life. This is what the tradition calls all-encompassing sadhana: the understanding that once we step onto this path, everything becomes part of the practice.

तीव्रसंवेगानामासन्नः

tīvra-samvegānām āsannaḥ

For those whose aspiration is profound and whose practice is carried forward with earnestness and intensity, self-realization is near.
—Yoga Sutra 1.21

Practice: *Virabhadrasana I and II*

The Virabhadrasana series cultivates strength, stability, courage, and focused awareness. These qualities support the yogic ideal of “skill in action” [*yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam*], helping us meet life’s challenges with steadiness and purpose.



VIRABHADRASANA I



VIRABHADRASANA II

A Deeper Understanding of Health

The inner tradition defines health not simply as the absence of illness, but as a dynamic state of harmony between body, mind, emotions, and spirit. Many of the stress-related challenges of modern life arise from having drifted away from our own inner balance.

Yoga seeks to restore this balance through:

- Conscious breathing and pranayama
- A lifestyle aligned with natural rhythms
- Disciplined and intentional thought
- Right diet and nourishment
- Ongoing self-study and reflection
- A living connection to our spiritual nature

In this way, Yoga functions both as prevention—helping us stay well—and as transformation, gradually reshaping the way we experience life from the inside out.

हेयं दुःखमनागतम्
heyam duḥkham anāgatam

The suffering that has not yet arisen is to be prevented.

—**Yoga Sutra 2.16**

Practice: *Vajrasana, Mandukasana, Uttana Mandukasana, Shashankasana, Makarasana*

These postures support healthy digestion, relaxation, and balanced breathing while calming the nervous system. Together they reflect Yoga's holistic approach to health, restoring harmony between body, breath, and mind.



VAJRASANA



MANDUKASANA



UTTANA MANDUKASANA



SHASHANKASANA



MAKARASANA

Yama and Niyama: The Ethical Roots

Without ethical grounding, even the most advanced physical or breathing practices remain surface-level. Daaji consistently returns to *yama* and *niyama*—the foundational ethical principles of Yoga—as the soil in which genuine practice can take root.

Living these values is not about moral perfection. It is a daily, humble effort. These values include:

- **ahimsa [non-violence]:** in our speech, thoughts, and choices
- **satya [truthfulness]:** with ourselves as much as with others
- **saucha [purity]:** of body, mind, and environment
- **santosha [contentment]:** the quiet art of being enough, right now
- **svadhyaya [self-study]:** the courage to look honestly at ourselves

अहिंसासत्यास्तेयब्रह्मचर्यापरिग्रहा यमाः

ahimsā-satya-asteya-brahmacarya-aparigrahāḥ yamāḥ

Non-violence [*ahimsā*], truthfulness [*satya*], non-stealing [*asteya*], wise moderation of vital energy [*brahmacarya*], and non-possessiveness [*aparigraha*—these five constitute the Yamas, the foundational ethical restraints of Yoga.

—Yoga Sutra 2.30

Living Yoga means choosing patience over reaction, awareness over impulse, gratitude over grasping, and compassion over self-centeredness—not once, but again and again, in ordinary moments throughout the day.

वितर्कबाधने प्रतिपक्षभावनम्

vitarka-bādhane pratipakṣa-bhāvanam

When the mind is disturbed by negative or harmful thoughts [*vitarka*], one should actively cultivate their opposite [*pratipakṣa-bhāvana*]—countering

destructive patterns by deliberately turning the mind toward their antidote.

—**Yoga Sutra 2.33**

Breath: The Bridge Between Worlds

In the Yoga tradition, breath is considered sacred. Daaji places particular emphasis on this teaching: Breath is life. Pranayama—often translated simply as breathing exercises—is, at a deeper level, a method of refining consciousness itself.

तस्मिन्सति श्वासप्रश्वासयोगतिविच्छेदः प्राणायामः
tasmin sati śvāsa-prāśvāsayoḥ gati-vicchedaḥ
prāṇāyāmaḥ

Once steadiness in posture [āsana] is established, prāṇāyāma is the conscious regulation and refinement of the flow of inhalation and exhalation.

—**Yoga Sutra 2.49**

Most of us breathe shallowly and unconsciously, mirroring the restlessness of the mind. When we bring awareness to the breath—slowing it, deepening it, steadying it—something remarkable happens: the mind begins to follow. Agitation settles. The scattered self slowly becomes integrated.

प्रच्छर्दनविधारणाभ्यां वा प्राणस्य
pracchardana-vidhāraṇābhyām vā prāṇasya

Mental tranquility may also be attained through the conscious, regulated exhalation and gentle retention of the breath [prāṇa].

—**Yoga Sutra 1.34**

ततः क्षीयते प्रकाशावरणम्
tataḥ kṣīyate prakāśāvaraṇam

Through this practice, the veil of mental impurities that obscures the inner light of consciousness is gradually removed.

—**Yoga Sutra 2.52**



NADI SHODHANA PRANAYAMA

धारणासु च योग्यता मनसः
dhāraṇāsu ca yogyatā manasaḥ

As a result, the mind becomes fit and prepared for sustained concentration (dhāraṇā).

—**Yoga Sutra 2.53**

Practice: *Nadi Shodhana Pranayama, Bhramari Pranayama, Ujjayi Pranayama*

These pranayama practices gently regulate the breath, quiet mental fluctuations, and cultivate inner awareness. They demonstrate how conscious breathing serves as the bridge between the outer and inner dimensions of Yoga.

Yoga Reshapes Who We Are

Perhaps the most profound promise of the inner tradition is this: Yoga, practiced sincerely over time, gradually reshapes the personality from within. The body becomes steadier, emotions more balanced, the intellect clearer, and the spirit more open.



BHRAMARI PRANAYAMA

The result is not a flawless, unshakeable saint. It is something more human and more beautiful: a person who is increasingly awake—more patient in difficulty, more present in joy, more compassionate in connection, more honest in relationship.

Yoga is never about escaping life. It is about showing up to life more fully, more gracefully, and more truly as ourselves.

Living Your Yoga, Every Day

The inner tradition of Yoga is ultimately a journey of conscious living—not a destination we reach, but a quality of awareness we cultivate, moment by moment, day by day.

When this understanding takes root, the boundaries of the mat dissolve. Our thoughts become a form of practice. Our speech becomes a form of practice. Our relationships become mirrors for growth. Our daily actions—however small or ordinary—become our highest sadhana.

To live your Yoga is to transform ordinary existence into sacred living.



UJJAYI PRANAYAMA

As the great spiritual masters remind us, the aim of Yoga is not merely physical health or mental calm, though these naturally follow. Its deepest aim is a profound inner awakening: to participate in the world fully, consciously, and harmoniously, and to be established in our highest nature.

That awakening does not wait for the perfect retreat or the next yoga class. It begins here—in this breath, this moment, this choice.

FROM THE HEARTFULNESS YOGA ACADEMY

Heartfulness Yoga Academy offers accredited, tradition-rooted programs that integrate asanas, pranayama, and Heartfulness Meditation with Yogic Transmission for a holistic approach to Yoga.

yogaacademy.heartfulness.org





Braj Within

From restoring the sacred landscape to rediscovering the sacred within: DAAJI's vision for VRAJ VAIBHAV ABHIYAN.

BY **EKTA BOUDERLIQUE**

In June 2026, I traveled with Daaji through Braj, the sacred region of northern India associated with Krishna's childhood. I could never have guessed that the journey would give rise to a movement.

Daaji stayed at the Heartfulness ashram in Mathura, only a few meters from the Krishna Janmabhoomi temple. Each morning, temple bells reached us before the full force of the late summer heat. By then, the streets were already filling with pilgrims: families arriving by bus and tractor,

barefoot devotees carrying cloth bags, elderly people leaning on relatives, and children asleep in their mothers' arms, all creating a colorful chaos.

I have traveled with Daaji often enough to recognize the moment when something has seized his attention. He sees both the systemic failures within a situation and the possibility beyond it. In Braj, that perception caused him an unusual sadness. Braj lives in the imagination of millions as the holy landscape where Krishna's childhood lila [divine play] unfolded. Mathura, Vrindavan,



Govardhan, Barsana, Nandgaon, and Gokul form a sacred geography whose hills, forests, kunds [sacred ponds], and pathways have been sanctified by centuries of poetry, pilgrimage, and devotion. Even the dust, known as Braj raj, is revered. Pilgrims stoop to touch it before raising it to their foreheads.

Many pilgrims arrive carrying an idealized vision of Braj. Instead, they encounter a region straining beneath the weight of the devotion it receives each day.

Shortly after sunrise, the roads thicken with endless cars, two-wheelers, and pedestrians. Monkeys leap across rooftops and electrical wires. Traffic presses between pilgrims, animals, and vendors. Loudspeakers compete with horns and temple bells. Families sleep in the open on the pavement. Waste gathers beside roads and water



channels. The smell of open sewers, stagnant water, and waste drifts through streets, clashing with the heady mix of spice and temple incense. It hits you hard.

At Govardhan, Daaji observed pilgrims undertaking parikrama [ritual circumambulation] through heat, dust, and traffic. Some walked barefoot. Others performed dandavat parikrama, lying full length upon the road, marking the point reached with their fingertips before rising and beginning again. The journey can continue for days.

Though their devotion was unmistakable, it was the absence of care around them that moved him.

Where could an elderly pilgrim rest amid the crowd? Was clean drinking water available? How could someone absorbed in prayer remain safe beside moving traffic? Where could a mother wash her child? Who would help the sick or exhausted?

A pilgrimage cannot become an inward journey when its most basic human needs remain unmet. Together with local authorities, we visited several pilgrim facilitation centers. Daaji examined the kitchens, sanitation, sleeping quarters, and drinking-water arrangements. Though



established with good intentions, these institutions struggled with management and maintenance.

Daaji's attention settled on the practical details. Could the kitchens provide three nourishing meals each day? Were the toilets clean and functional? Would families find a safe place to rest? Who would maintain these standards long after the inauguration, when public attention had moved elsewhere?

For Daaji, serviceable infrastructure should meet every need, elegantly and simply, as it does at Kanha Shanti Vanam, the Heartfulness Institute's headquarters.





Under Daaji's guidance, it envisages the ecological and cultural renewal of Braj through water restoration, forest revival, native tree planting, improved pilgrim facilities, waste management, institutional cooperation, and the creation of meditation spaces across the region.



At Radha Kund, pilgrims approached the water with reverence. Some touched it to their foreheads; others descended the ghats [steps] to bathe. Sacred memory remained alive in every gesture. Yet the water was so polluted that some of us hesitated to even approach its edge.

Daaji did not regard the condition of Radha Kund as an isolated failure. He saw at once the larger pattern: polluted water, including the sacred Yamuna River itself, neglected pilgrim routes, inadequate facilities, disappearing green cover, and a sacred landscape being consumed faster than it could recover.

He did not linger over the diagnosis. The moment he grasped the scale of Braj's decline, his response took the form of action: Vraj Vaibhav Abhiyan, a vast, sustained initiative to restore the region's water bodies, forests, pilgrim facilities, and sacred ecology.

Vraj Vaibhav Abhiyan reaches far beyond restoring a single kund or refurbishing an isolated pilgrim center. Under Daaji's guidance, it envisages the ecological and cultural renewal of Braj through water restoration, forest revival, native tree planting, improved pilgrim facilities, waste management, institutional cooperation, and the creation of meditation spaces across the region.



Daaji does not separate meditation from responsibility or spiritual perception from practical work. The inner must find its outward expression. For Daaji, reverence without stewardship is more evident in Braj than any other place in India. The land associated with Krishna now requires organized action in equal measure to the devotion it inspires.

And Braj is buckling under the weight of devotion. Mathura recorded about 90 million visits in 2024, while the Mathura–Vrindavan region still faced a daily sewage-treatment shortfall of roughly 81 million liters. A new plant entered trial operation in March 2026, but infrastructure remains far behind the scale of the pilgrimage.

During his visit, Daaji spoke boldly of the need to revive the fundamental understanding of sacredness. In Vedic times, he said, spiritual





life was not centered upon temples, which were erected much later. Instead, people encountered the sacred in fire, water, wind, rain, mountains, and forests. Nature itself revealed the divine presence as it moved through all life, and the inner spiritual practices of that time granted people the sensitivity to sense the interconnected fabric of existence.

After millennia, temple traditions were imposed upon communities as places for collective worship. Over time, the Divine came to be increasingly located within the temple's inner sanctum, approached through prescribed forms, and encountered at appointed times—all while creating immense fortunes from offerings, which provided the priesthood with a phenomenal income that it still fiercely protects.

Daaji's consistent effort is to return the seeker to the antaryamin, the indwelling divine presence.



Heartfulness meditation begins with the gentle suggestion that the Source of divine Light is already present within the heart. As Daaji often says, Krishna has already given us his “address,” declaring:

अहमात्मा गुडाकेश सर्वभूताशयस्थितः ।
अहमादिश्च मध्यं च भूतानामन्त एव च ।

*aham ātmā guḍākeśa sarva-bhūtāśaya-sthitaḥ;
aham ādiś ca madhyaṁ ca bhūtānām anta eva ca*

“I am the Self, O Gudakesha, dwelling in the hearts of all beings.
I am the beginning, the middle, and also the end of all beings.”

—Bhagavad Gita 10.20

Krishna identifies himself as the indwelling Self, the antaryamin, present in every heart. Yet we continue traveling from temple to temple in search of the One who has already told us where

he resides! Pilgrimage reaches its fulfillment when the outer journey leads to the heart.

Heartfulness practice invites that movement from the very beginning. Rather than beginning with belief alone, it starts with inner experience, from which a new state of being gradually emerges, eventually leading toward the dissolution of the limited self in the Absolute. At first, one meditates upon the divine presence in the heart. Soon, one begins to experience it. With continued practice, the distance between the seeker and the sought begins to diminish. Prayer becomes less a petition and more an offering of the self in joyful surrender. Meditation moves beyond thought, image, and emotion. The heart grows increasingly transparent to a reality that cannot be contained by words. At its highest reaches, spirituality ceases to concern itself with personal desire, accumulated merit, or religious identity. It becomes the refinement—and ultimately the transcendence—of identity itself.

This spiritual horizon gives Daaji's work in Braj its deeper significance. Clean roads, revived forests, and repaired kunds are essential, yet they remain outward expressions of a more profound movement from possession to surrender, from separation to participation, and from the individual self toward the universal presence.

During the visit, Daaji conducted satsang [group meditation] at the samadhi [memorial shrine] of Deoraha Baba, the revered twentieth-century saint, and at other sacred places across Braj. To sit in meditation with him and receive Pranahuti [Yogic Transmission] was to encounter these sites differently.

As I sat with him, I remembered Babuji Maharaj's account of coming to Braj in 1947, being guided by the great masters to the exact locations associated with Krishna, and sowing the seeds of Pranahuti across this sacred landscape. The memory returned with extraordinary force. Nearly 80 years separated the two journeys, yet in that moment, they no longer seemed separate. What Babuji had planted in silence appeared to be stirring again through Daaji as a living current drawing the seeker inward.

Pilgrims often arrive carrying stories of saints, accounts of miracles, inherited reverence, and the

accumulated emotion of generations. Meditation redirects that aspiration toward direct experience. The seeker becomes still enough to personally sense the inner charge of a place rather than merely hear about it.

Since Daaji's visit, meditation has begun at several locations in Braj. This may prove to be among the quietest and most consequential aspects of the entire undertaking, for a sacred place remains alive when it awakens the sacred within those who visit it. Through meditation and Pranahuti, aspirants are invited beyond admiration for Krishna and beyond the repetition of his name toward direct inner experience. They are invited to discover Krishna within.

The recognition of the antaryamin also changes our relationship with nature. A pond cannot become a drain, a forest cannot be dismissed as vacant land, an animal cannot be treated as an inconvenience, and pilgrims cannot be allowed to disappear into a crowd without having attended to their needs.

The same presence lives within all.

The restoration of outer Braj begins within.





The impact of sacred places being surrounded by neglect is severe. While Braj could show that an ancient tradition remains capable of offering direct experience, ethical responsibility, and transformation, it could equally repel thoughtful seekers through disorder, commercialization, and the repetition of forms whose meaning has been forgotten.

More than a century ago, Swami Vivekananda courageously carried spirituality into the realms of education and service. He demanded that the Divine be recognized in the poor, the hungry, and the forgotten. Today, Daaji carries that demand into the conditions of the twenty-first century.

Devotion must be expressed as service, which must extend to the pilgrim searching for water, the mother sleeping beside a road, the kund receiving sewage, and the forest disappearing beneath construction. It must include groundwater, biodiversity, public

health, transparent administration, and the very consciousness from which human action arises. For Daaji, thought pollution lies at the root of every unfortunate human error from which the planet now suffers.

At the end of one visit, we sat in meditation while Braj continued around us. Traffic moved beyond the walls. Bells rang. Vendors called. Pilgrims continued through the heat.

For a while, the outward Braj receded. The Braj within began to emerge.

As our convoy pulled out of Mathura, I found myself reflecting that the future of Braj depends upon devotion finding its fullest expression in transformation. The same devotion that draws millions there must also restore the land, care for the pilgrim, and ultimately lead the seeker to the divine presence within.



When the kunds become clear, when the land begins to breathe again, when every pilgrim is received with dignity, and when the seeker discovers the Divine as the antaryamin within, the outer Braj and the inner Braj will no longer stand apart but will be realized as one sacred reality.

VRAJ VAIBHAV ABHIYAN is dedicated to the ecological, cultural, and spiritual renewal of Braj. It encompasses the restoration of sacred forests, water bodies, pilgrimage infrastructure, and natural heritage, together with long-term stewardship through community participation and service. Learn more, volunteer, or support the initiative at vrajvaibhav.org.



children

“A child’s world is fresh and new and beautiful,
full of wonder and excitement.”

RACHEL CARSON





Marlo and the Winding River

A forest tale about a little otter, a winding river, and the discovery that some journeys cannot be forced.

BY LIAA KUMAR

Marlo the otter was unbelievably excited. Today was the first time he was going to swim all the way down the winding river to Sunstone Pool. It was the best spot in the whole forest, with plenty of sunshine and warm, flat rocks to lie on. All the otters would gather there in the summer afternoons.

There was just one tiny problem. To get to Sunstone Pool, Marlo had to travel down the fastest, most twisty part of the river, with plenty of tumbling rapids that raced past big mossy rocks. But Marlo wasn't scared; he was a strong swimmer. "If I just paddle hard enough," Marlo thought, puffing out his chest, "I'll be there in no time at all!"

So Marlo took a deep breath and dove in. He paddled as hard as his little paws could go, straight and fast, just as he'd planned. But the river had ideas of its own. Strong swirls of water kept spinning him sideways. He kicked harder.

But then a current shoved him headfirst toward a gigantic rock. He pushed back against it with all his might. The harder Marlo fought the water, the more the water seemed to fight back. It tossed him this way and that, until he was dizzy and breathless and hadn't gotten very far at all.

"No, no, this isn't right," Marlo grumbled, scrambling onto a rock to catch his breath. "I just have to

try harder." So back in he went, paddling even more furiously than before—only for the river to spin him around again and again, plopping him right back where he'd started. Marlo clung to his rock, his arms aching and his heart sinking. "I'm never going to make it," he sighed.

Just then, he spotted an old turtle drifting down the river. She wasn't paddling at all. She floated along



easily, riding the very same current that had been tossing Marlo about like a leaf.

“Excuse me! Excuse me!” Marlo called out. “How are you moving so easily? I’ve been paddling as hard as I can, and I keep getting pushed around!”

The old turtle drifted to a gentle stop beside his rock and gave a slow, kind smile. “Ah,” she said. “That’s just it, little one. You’ve been pushing against the river. But the river already knows the way to where you’re going.” She gave a lazy little kick. “You don’t have to force it down one straight path. Just feel where the water wants to

carry you and add your own gentle little nudges along the way.”

Marlo wasn’t so sure. But his paws were too tired to fight anymore. So, slowly, he let go of his rock. He stopped paddling so hard. He rolled onto his back the way the turtle had, and he let the current take him.

And something wonderful happened. When the river bent, he leaned with it. When a rock came near, he gave a soft little kick and slipped right around it. The rapids that had seemed so scary now bubbled beneath him gently. He wasn’t battling the river anymore. He was flowing with it.

And before he knew it, the river carried him right into Sunstone Pool. His friends cheered as he drifted in, spinning happily on his back.

“Marlo! You made it!” they called.

Marlo grinned and floated out onto the warm rocks, looking back at the winding river he had finally traveled. “I was trying so hard to do it just one way,” he said softly. “But I didn’t need to fight the river at all. I just needed to let it carry me home.”

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The Outer Life of Inner Transformation

At Kanha Shanti Vanam, inner spiritual transformation is expressed outwardly through the restoration of land, water, biodiversity, and community life.

BY [SRIRAM RAGHAVENDRAN](#)





Visualize this: The year is 2015. A barren land on the outskirts of a city—about 1,500 acres of it. Barely 200 trees on the entire land. The water table is at 1,200 feet below ground. Red soil that is porous with no ability to retain water and nutrients, low soil organic carbon, conditions so poor that agriculture has come to a complete stop in the many villages around the area. Biodiversity? The thought would not even cross our minds when we look at such a desolate place. The land appears worthless, and there are no takers.

Kanha Shanti Vanam, the headquarters of the Heartfulness

Institute, was built on this desolate land in less than 10 years. Today, it is considered a case study in ecological restoration. The rainwater harvesting structures and lakes on campus have raised the water table by 1,000 feet. Over 200,000 trees dot the landscape, some of which have grown 50–60 feet in this short period. Biodiversity is back. Over 1,000 endemic tree and plant species have been planted here, including more than 80 endangered and threatened species. Over 170 species of birds have been reported, including migratory birds. Agriculture has returned, not only at Kanha but also in the 50

villages around it. Nestled amidst this young jungle and greenery is the world's largest meditation center that can accommodate over 100,000 people at one time.

Why would a spiritual organization undertake such activities in ecology, environment, and agriculture? How does it all come together?

Heartfulness is a journey in inner transformation. It works at the mental level to reduce distraction and strengthen focus, at the emotional level to cultivate balance, and at the level of character to refine individual



qualities. There are innumerable qualities in a human being, and the ability to refine these qualities and transcend them is what inner growth and development are all about. That is the goal of Heartfulness.

But is inner transformation alone enough? Should not this inner transformation reflect in the world outside us? What use is it to say that I have changed if my intentions, words, and actions have not changed? As on the inside, so on the outside. Proof that an individual has transformed must be evidenced by their actions.

Spirituality is the journey toward perfection. A highly developed person thinks, speaks, and acts exactly as is appropriate in any given situation—nothing more, nothing less.

Daaji, the spiritual guide of the Heartfulness movement, says that the United Nations has codified the world's maladies extremely well in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. But he adds that the most important—the root cause of these maladies—is missing: thought pollution. Most of the world's problems arise and persist due to greed,

possessiveness, ungenerousness, and self-centeredness, combined with a crass indifference to others.

It is his submission that thought pollution should be added as the 18th Sustainable Development Goal, because, unless the individual human being is transformed, it is not possible to bring about lasting change in the world. This is the role of Heartfulness in the world: to provide the tools for inner transformation to one and all, free of charge, globally.

To symbolize this symbiotic relationship between the inner and outer, Kanha Shanti Vanam cannot restrict itself to inner transformation alone. Although meditation and inner transformation are the heart of the activities at Kanha Shanti Vanam, Heartfulness also runs over 200 initiatives across ecology, environment, agriculture, education, health and wellness, livelihood, sports, and research. Today, Kanha is emerging as an innovation center, where new ideas are incubated for the benefit of all. These operations are made possible by thousands of practitioners who, deeply touched by the spiritual practice,

volunteer their time to guide these initiatives. Kanha aims to be the start of a new culture in which human beings devote time to refining themselves, experiencing fundamental inner transformation, caring not only for themselves and their families but for others, and for Mother Earth, taking only as much as is required and giving back far more than one takes.

These are yet small beginnings, but they point toward the world we should aspire to leave our children and those who come after them. Aspiration alone is not enough. It must be backed by action, and it has to start with us.

FROM FORESTS BY HEARTFULNESS

Forests by Heartfulness nurtures and protects native, endemic, and endangered plant species through expert-guided nurseries, plantation drives, long-term monitoring, and community participation.

heartfulness.org/forests/



reader voices

“The best way to predict the future
is to create it.”

PETER DRUCKER



The Flow of Life

Exploring flow as the very nature of life, this article reflects on movement, awareness, and the suffering that arises when we resist change.

BY ELIZABETH DENLEY

In modern psychology, “flow” is described as a focused mental state in which action merges with awareness, characterized by a lack of distractions and a loss of self-consciousness. While that is a lovely state, there is a deeper metaphysical understanding of “flow” that appeals to me, and it is our very nature.

The most constant thing in life is change. There is a continuous transmutation of energy and matter, including our own cells and ideas, which are constantly being replaced. In yogic literature, the human energy field, or *pranamaya kosha*, has five complementary “winds” that flow according to daily, monthly, and longer-term cycles. They move inward, upward, downward, outward, and they circulate and assimilate, driving all the energetic processes of human life. The chakras themselves form a network of interconnected, moving knots of energy, and beyond all of them is the soul, the *atman*, which is also defined by movement. In his book, *Truth Eternal*, Ram Chandra of Fatehgarh [Lalaji] describes this beautifully:

“The Sanskrit word ‘atman’ is formed of *ath* and *ma(na)n*. *Ath* means movement, and *ma(na)n* means thinking. That in which there is movement and thinking is atman. The soul itself is the causal body which is in seed form and which is a compound substance. The same thing expresses itself at the physical and mental or subtle body levels. When it wakes and enters the conscious level, movement sets in in the sense organs and organs of perception, by the movement of its flow; when it comes to the mental level (dream state) it remains thoughtful; and when it withdraws its flow (current) to the state of deep sleep, it remains absorbed in its original form and enjoys bliss...

“Action or karma is the nature, or dharma, of the physical body. Just as the formation of body is natural, its movement also is natural, and so also the law of reward and punishment is natural. Every embodied being is called *jiva*, the characteristic of which is movement.



In this movement works the principle of development or growth, and contemplation.

“Jiva is soul because that in which there is movement (ath) and thinking (man) is soul. This soul is Brahman. Brahman is developing and thinking creation. In Sanskrit, ‘Brahman’ is derived from *bruha*, to grow or to expand, and man, to think. That which moves and thinks is atman, and that which grows and thinks is Brahman.”¹

In other words, life *is* movement and flow, and Ram Chandra of Shahjahanpur [Babuji] says the

same thing another way when he says, “The secret of life is to keep moving.” It is our nature, at the level of the soul, the heart, the mind, and the body.

Yet, knowing this, we still sometimes resist change and hold on to things, be they material possessions, people, places, emotions, experiences, or beliefs, including about ourselves. When we hold on to anything with the intention of maintaining the status quo, we start to accumulate heaviness and stuckness in our energy system, just as water stagnates and starts to stink when a river is dammed. The resulting knots attract more of

Awareness is everything when it comes to being in the flow, as Daaji has been saying so often of late. He describes a dharmic life as one based on awareness—the ability to witness circumstances and respond with purity, simplicity, and clarity in the present moment.

the same, eventually hardening into tendencies, habits, and character traits. In contrast, when we let go, clear the slate, and keep moving, we live in a state of flow.

Why do we resist? Is it because we fear letting go of the structure of our lives, even when that structure no longer serves us? That very resistance becomes the cause of our suffering. We respond to change with defensiveness instead of wonder and interest, and it becomes hard work, like swimming upstream in a river instead of floating with the current toward the ocean.

Where does that fear come from? Perhaps it is fear of the unknown. In a river, we have the left and right banks for reference and security—our dualities of right and wrong, good and bad, etc. Traveling downstream or upstream is simply a choice of direction. But as the river widens and

eventually reaches the ocean, the distinction of dualities blurs. The banks become further apart, and eventually they are nonexistent, and so our navigation of life has to respond to a different dimension, beyond dualities. The rulebook about right and wrong, good and bad, no longer serves us.

Perhaps it is the fear of the disapproval we may face from family, friends, and society. It is difficult to follow the heart when we are driven by social norms. It is not that rules have no purpose, as they are surely needed in social contexts, but they must evolve in order to stay relevant. And along with those rules, we need something more dynamic, immediate, and alive; we need awareness.

Awareness is everything when it comes to being in the flow, as Daaji has been saying so often of late. He describes a dharmic life as one based on awareness—the ability to witness circumstances and respond with purity, simplicity, and clarity in the present moment. That is one aspect of being in a state of flow.

In his articles on Yogic Psychology, Daaji also refers to the great sage Patanjali's description of *avidya*, or lack of awareness, in the Yoga Sutra. Patanjali lists lack of awareness as the first *klesha*, the core mental affliction that is the mother of all other mental complaints and imbalances, the cause of all our misery. Daaji reminds us that we can dispel *avidya* by purifying and expanding the canvas of consciousness upon which awareness and perception can then work as a witness. We do this through the inner practices of Heartfulness.

The tragedy at the heart of our resistance to change is that we mistake stasis for equilibrium and complacency for contentment. Life is not static and never will be, because it is movement and evolution. We may know it, but we still seem to need help to really live it.



The spiritual path is often portrayed as requiring effort and discipline to turn inward, away from the outward flow of entropy. But what if we look at it the other way around? Flowing toward the center of our being is like floating in a river toward the ocean; it requires letting go and simply accepting the events of the voyage. Swimming upstream requires effort, and that effort is the suffering and fear we experience when we resist change and hold on to outdated structures, rules, and forms. Is it difficult for a raindrop to merge into a mighty river, which then merges into the sea? No, the raindrop does not struggle as it falls into the water; it would require much more effort for it to remain separate rather than merge into the river and the sea. I think we are the same. We want to “flow” in the current of life, as that is our natural state. We make it more difficult than it

needs to be because we believe it is difficult, and we suffer as a result. All that can change with a simple shift of consciousness.

Now, what happens once that raindrop disappears into the ocean? Does it stop moving? The water continues to flow in the currents, and some even evaporates and forms new raindrops, which bring life to trees and quench our thirst. Everything is in flow in this magnificent universe, and once we celebrate that process, it is so much easier to accept everything life brings our way. That is flow.

¹ Ram Chandra of Fatehgarh (Lalaji), *Truth Eternal*, 3rd ed. (Shri Ram Chandra Mission, 2018), 22–23.

The Space between
Reaction
and
Choice



Why do old reactions take over even when we know better? This article looks at the brief inner moment where feeling, habit, and choice come close together.

BY JASON NUTTING

Why is change often so difficult, even when we clearly understand what needs to change?

Most people already know what they should be doing. They know they should eat better, sleep more, exercise consistently, drink less, communicate honestly, set healthier boundaries, and manage stress more effectively. Yet knowledge alone rarely produces lasting change.

The challenge is rarely a lack of information. More often, the challenge appears in the moment when a familiar emotion arises, and an old pattern takes over.

Someone says something that lands the wrong way. An uncomfortable emotion surfaces. An urge appears. Before awareness catches up, the reaction is already underway.

A person may genuinely want to communicate calmly with their

spouse. But criticism appears, and something deeper awakens: fear of rejection, shame, inadequacy, abandonment, or loss of control. Within moments, defensiveness takes over. Later, they wonder why they reacted the way they did.

For many years, I assumed this was mainly a problem of discipline. However, over time, I began to see another possibility. We can understand a pattern completely yet still feel compelled to repeat it. Insight often fails to produce change because we are still identified with the experience we are trying to change.

Developmental psychologist Robert Kegan offers a useful perspective through his subject-object theory: what we are identified with tends to operate in the background of experience, without our noticing it.¹

For example, when anger fills our awareness, we rarely experience it as anger. Instead, we experience it

as reality. We speak from it, justify it, and organize our thinking around it. The same can happen with fear, shame, resentment, anxiety, or self-doubt. The emotion becomes the lens through which we interpret the moment.

In such moments, there is very little distance between the experience and the person experiencing it.

Self-awareness begins when that distance appears. A person notices, “I am feeling rejected right now.” A moment earlier, the rejection felt like reality. Now it is being observed as an experience.

That observation may seem simple, but something important has changed. The feeling of rejection is still present, yet one’s awareness is no longer completely absorbed by it. The experience can now be witnessed as well as felt. This is where choice becomes possible.



The pause may last only a few seconds. Yet within those few seconds, a person can refrain from sending the message they will later regret. They can listen instead of interrupting. They can notice the urge to withdraw without immediately withdrawing. They can experience anxiety without allowing anxiety to decide for them.

The external situation has not changed. The emotion has not disappeared. What has changed is the person's relationship with the experience.

Many contemplative traditions point toward this same capacity. The ability to observe our

thoughts, emotions, and impulses creates a different relationship with them. Reactions that once felt automatic become easier to recognize as they arise. Patterns that once operated unnoticed become visible.

Awareness, however, is not the destination. It is the beginning. As awareness deepens, we begin to recognize how much of our experience is shaped by impressions we have accumulated over time. Past hurts influence present conversations, just as current fears shape future decisions. Old conditioning silently colors the way we see ourselves, other people, and the world around us.

The ability to observe these movements within ourselves creates a different possibility. Rather than viewing life through the lens of habitual reactions, we begin meeting each moment with greater freshness and clarity. The present is no longer completely overshadowed by what has already happened or by what might happen next.

Heartfulness approaches this process from the inside out. Through meditation and cleaning, impressions gradually lose their hold, and the heart becomes lighter, clearer, and more receptive. As the heart changes, the mind changes with it. New responses arise naturally because our way of perceiving life has changed.

Perhaps this is why self-awareness occupies such an important place in spiritual growth. Awareness reveals the patterns that once operated unnoticed. The heart then has the opportunity to respond rather than react. Over time, this renovation of the heart becomes a renewal of the mind, and our relationship with life begins to reflect greater clarity, balance, and simplicity.

The space between reaction and choice may be small at first. Often it lasts only a moment. Yet that moment can change the direction of a conversation, a habit, a relationship, or even a life. What begins as a brief moment of awareness gradually becomes the capacity to meet reality more directly—less influenced by old conditioning, less driven by fear, and more aligned with what is actually present.

In that sense, the space between reaction and choice is about more than behavior change; it is an opening through which the heart can perceive more clearly, and life can be experienced more fully.

Heartfulness approaches this process from the inside out. Through meditation and cleaning, impressions gradually lose their hold, and the heart becomes lighter, clearer, and more receptive. As the heart changes, the mind changes with it. New responses arise naturally because our way of perceiving life has changed.

We welcome your reflections, experiences, and submissions. Please visit heartfulness.org/magazine/contribute or scan the QR code



¹ Robert Kegan, *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

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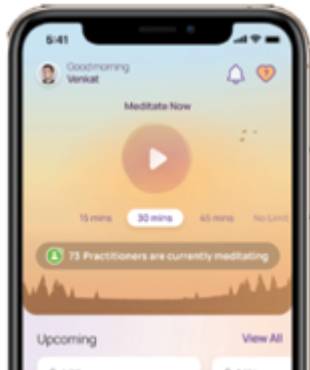
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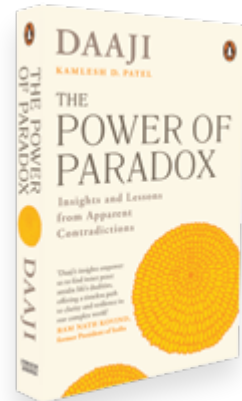


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learning.heartfulness.org



HFNLife

HFNLife strives to bring products to make your life simple and convenient. We offer a set of curated partners in apparel, accessories, eye-care, home staples, organic foods and more. The affiliation of our partner organizations with Heartfulness Institute helps in financially sustaining the programs which we conduct in various places across the world. hfnlife.com



We are planting millions of trees across India

An initiative of Heartfulness Institute to nurture, protect and conserve native, endemic and endangered tree species of India.



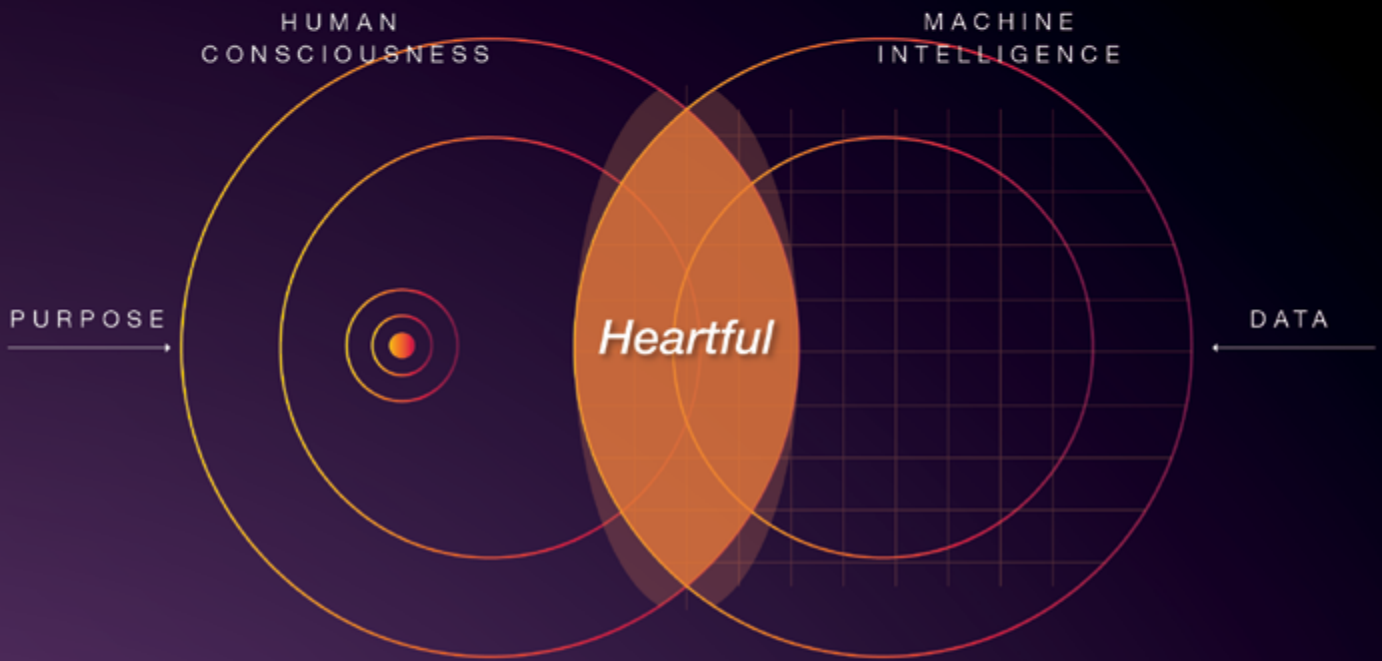
Participate in this movement by volunteering locally, gifting trees and partnerships, more details at:

Website: <https://heartfulness.org/forests/>

Gift or Contribute to loved ones at:

<https://heartfulness.org/forests/donations-gifting>

Write to us: fbh@heartfulness.org



AI that doesn't just think,
it understands.