

YOGA for SELF-REALIZATION

Living
in
the
Light

Includes
More Than
50 Yoga
Poses



New York Times Bestselling Author

Deepak Chopra, MD
and Sarah Platt-Finger

LIVING IN THE LIGHT

Yoga for Self-Realization

DEEPAK CHOPRA, MD,
AND SARAH PLATT-FINGER



HARMONY
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Please consult your doctor before practicing the yoga poses in this book, especially if you are pregnant, have cervical spine issues, or have high or low blood pressure.

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Contents

[Cover](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Part I by Deepak Chopra, MD](#)

[Overview: Royal Yoga and the Light of Life](#)

[Week 1: Social Intelligence](#)

[Week 2: Emotional Intelligence](#)

[Week 3: Bringing the Light to Your Body](#)

[Week 4: Vital Energy](#)

[Week 5: Staying in the Light](#)

[Week 6: The Power of Attention](#)

[Part II by Sarah Platt-Finger](#)

[The Asanas](#)

[Afterword: Where Do You Go from Here?](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Index](#)

[About the Authors](#)

PART I

By Deepak Chopra, MD



OVERVIEW

ROYAL YOGA AND THE LIGHT OF LIFE

Whatever you are doing to make your life better, Royal Yoga can bring you more of everything you want.

In that opening sentence lies the essence of this book, an immense promise that isn't just a matter of belief. For centuries in India, a path to fulfillment has been proven to work. In Sanskrit it is called Raja Yoga, *Raja* meaning “kingly,” “royal,” or simply “the highest.” *Royal Yoga* is a splendid way to put it. My aim is to show you why and how the path of Royal Yoga is the highest and most important of all Yoga traditions, explaining everything in terms that apply to modern people and everyday life. As far as I know, this goal is unique; I've never found another book that accomplished it.

We are talking about personal transformation that reaches beyond any lifestyle you might choose to follow, beyond any approach to wellness and healing, beyond any faith or religion. Royal Yoga is universal and all-embracing.

The *Yoga* part of *Royal Yoga* needs a little clarification at the outset. The basic Sanskrit word *Yoga* simply means to yoke, join, or unite (the English word *yoke* can be directly traced back to its ancient roots). In my part of the book (Part I), when I talk about *Yoga*, I mean the *complete system* of Yoga, namely, the union of all aspects of life—physical, emotional, and spiritual. Only one part of the whole Yoga system contains the exercises that people learn in yoga class (I will put the exercise part in lowercase and refer to the system of Yoga with a capital Y). The system is often called “Yoga

philosophy,” but that phrase sells the whole vision short. In Royal Yoga, no aspect of existence is left out. Everyone is used to dividing life into distinct parts: mind, body, emotions, work, family, relationships, and so on. Those are handy divisions, of course. The experience of going to the doctor, the gym, or yoga class can all be put in the compartment labeled “body.” Raising a child, going on a family vacation, and planning for retirement can all be placed in the compartment labeled “family.” As natural as it feels to divide life in this way, this kind of compartmentalization creates a problem that cuts to the very heart of existence.

Royal Yoga holds that these compartments are false to the wholeness of life. There are hidden possibilities that you will never reach, an intensity of fulfillment you will never experience, when your life is chopped into separate pieces like a loaf of bread cut into neat slices. Imagine yourself going through certain rituals and habits of your day—you get up, eat breakfast, go to work, call friends, do things with your family, and so on. Take a moment to visualize some specific ways that might make your day more satisfying. Perhaps a friend tells you a piece of good news, you complete a project at work, or you watch your child or spouse smile at you and you feel a rush of love.

If you rewind these experiences and evaluate them through the prism of Yoga, each event might look the same on the surface. But if you practice Royal Yoga, what happens inside is transformed: You find that you are living in the light. The effect is all-embracing, because if there is life, there should be light.

What is the light? For some this is a vague spiritual term that connotes religion. A Christian might think of the phrase, “Don’t hide your light under a bushel basket” or Jesus’s declaration to his disciples, “You are the light of the world.” In the rabbinical tradition of Judaism, the divine presence is Shechinah, which brings the light of God into the world when it permeates a devout or holy person. In many traditions, angelic beings are creatures of light, and saintly people emanate (physically or symbolically) a pure white light.

Royal Yoga transcends these religious connotations while embracing their deeper meaning. “Light” is pure awareness; it is the cosmic consciousness that creates and maintains the universe and everything in it. In practical terms, living in the light is about living consciously, and the ultimate goal in life is to live *only* in the light, having cast off every form of ignorance, pain, and suffering.

WHERE IS YOUR LIGHT?

Having read this far, you might be either skeptical or inspired. Something as all-embracing as Royal Yoga feels strange, at the very least. I’m not offering these concepts from the viewpoint of a true believer, because the vision of the Yoga tradition isn’t a set of beliefs. It is based on experiences that everyone is already having. You already live in the light; you just don’t live there all the time. Many people have experienced happiness, joy, and sometimes even pure bliss. But, on the flip side, there are dark experiences that bring confusion, pain, and suffering. Nonetheless, the light of life is always with you because light is your very nature, your true self.

Royal Yoga is unique because it seeks to make everyday life ideal. There is infinite bliss as the starting point, located in your true self. Whenever you experience less bliss, no bliss, or actual pain and suffering, only one thing changes: how close you are to the light. This concept defines the entire Yoga system, no matter how complex its traditions are in India. There are literally thousands of Yoga commentaries, and their intricacy can be mind-bending. But we can cut through the complexity by focusing on just one thing: living in the light.

It is vital to understand what the ideal life is, according to Royal Yoga. What makes its approach so natural is that nothing achieved through Royal Yoga is mystical or otherworldly. The self you experience today owes its most valued experiences to your true self, which is already whole and perfect.

The Ideal Life: The Gifts of Royal Yoga

1. Existence becomes blissful. You experience a joyful, energetic body; a loving, compassionate heart; an alert, vibrant mind; and lightness of being.
2. You control your mental activity. You can generate thoughts, feelings, and impulses that are evolutionary. You are the one who gives them meaning, and therefore the whole world as you perceive it has meaning.
3. You see everyday life as a lucid dream, incredibly vivid but an illusion. You can improve the dream without getting trapped in it.
4. Joy becomes the only measure of success because your essential nature is joy. It is the beginning and endpoint of every journey.
5. You understand what it means to thrive. You savor the diversity of life, which brings richness to your unfolding story.
6. You recognize that the point of arrival is always now. You can't move to where you are already standing—this is the experience of timelessness.
7. You recognize that you have no fixed identity. Your identity is unique but always evolving. It is your karmic story, but you don't need to be bound by it.
8. You recognize gratitude as the sanest response to existence. It is insanity to believe that existence is a problem.
9. You recognize that existence is lavish and abundant.
10. Grace becomes an everyday experience. It reveals itself by the perfect way that every experience fits together. Instead of brief glimpses of synchronicity, you live in total synchronicity.

Before we go any further, I'd like you to assess your experiences of the light. Nothing is more important than knowing how much the light has affected your life. Take the following self-assessment, and you will begin to know yourself much better than most people do.

Ten Ways to Be in the Light

Yoga asks you to identify entirely with the light, which doesn't happen all at once. The light is glimpsed, to begin with, in memorable experiences. Everyone has had them at one time or another. The list on the following pages includes the most important kinds of experiences.

To assess where you are right now, look at each statement and circle the response that applies to you. The time frame isn't critical—some experiences might be very recent; others very far back. The point is to recognize moments of heightened experience. There are no right or wrong responses. Just assess your experience as objectively as you can. When in doubt, choose the answer that first comes to mind.

1. I have experienced bliss. (Examples: a peak experience of a joyful, energetic body; a loving, compassionate heart; an alert, vibrant mind; lightness of being.)

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Frequently
- Don't know

2. I feel in control of my mental experience—I can have positive, creative thoughts whenever I want.

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Frequently
- Don't know

3. Life can feel like a dream, with something hidden from sight that is very real and yet mysterious.

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Frequently
- Don't know

4. Much more than material success, I measure my life by my level of happiness and joy.

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Frequently
- Don't know

5. I welcome a wide diversity of experiences—they give my life real richness.

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Frequently
- Don't know

6. I live in the present moment, without reliving the past or anticipating the future.

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Frequently
- Don't know

7. I experience myself in the flow, adapting easily to new situations.

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Frequently
- Don't know

8. I experience gratitude.

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Frequently
- Don't know

9. I look upon life as abundant, offering untold possibilities for fulfillment.

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Frequently
- Don't know

10. I experience meaningful coincidences—they tell me that everything happens for a reason.

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Frequently
- Don't know

ASSESSING YOUR ANSWERS

This questionnaire is about seeing yourself according to the quality of your inner life. Being

in the light is what ties together these ten experiences. If you have a rich inner life, you will likely mark "Frequently" more than half the time. On the other hand, if you often answered "Never" or "Rarely," your inner life isn't fulfilling. The light has become blocked or obscured. Most people will fall somewhere in between the light and the dark. They are aware of their inner life, but don't turn to it as a great source of fulfillment.

For most of us, positive experiences come and go at will; we have little control over them. Fears, regrets, and painful memories seem to have a life of their own. Yoga teaches us to change the situation through the following steps, which will become second nature as the book unfolds:

You pay more attention to what is going on inside you.

You notice any experience of being in the light.

You value that experience.

You begin to focus more and more on the light, increasing it in your life.

Living in the light is the most natural way to live. It is easier to live more consciously than to continue experiencing things unconsciously, driven by habit, routine, old conditioning, and denial. The habit of being more conscious will emerge effortlessly and without pain and discomfort if you keep in mind that the best experiences in your life indicate that you have been living in the light all along, while struggling to get there.

THIRTY DAYS OF ROYAL YOGA

Living in the light can begin anytime you choose. The principles taught in Royal Yoga are not difficult to learn, and over the next thirty days we can cover all the major areas you need to understand. Traditionally, these areas are called the eight limbs, or *ashtangas*, of Yoga. We are going to treat them as eight stages of transformation.

Here is how a map of the journey looks. Our thirty-day journey is divided into six weeks, and each week gives you five days of participation—the weekend is your time off, to reflect upon and absorb everything you have learned.

I give the traditional Sanskrit names for the eight limbs, but you don't need to memorize them. What is important is the theme for each week, beginning with Social Intelligence in Week 1, Emotional Intelligence in Week 2, and so on. Living in the light involves awakening awareness, layer by layer, until you reach your source, the true self, which is the light of pure awareness.

Here's the whole program at a glance.

Week 1: Social Intelligence

(Stage of Transformation—Yama)

In the first week, you learn to find the light in your social world of family, work, and relationships. Royal Yoga considers this the outer shell of existence. You move through it with your own habits, rituals, likes, and dislikes. Your personality is your identity, which has been adapted from input and pressure from society. By bringing light and lightness to your social self, you prepare the way for the later stages of the journey.

Week 2: Emotional Intelligence

(Stage of Transformation—Niyama)

In the second week, you learn to bring light and lightness to your emotional life. Royal Yoga considers this stage to be more personal than the

outer or social sphere, yet you are still involved with other people and your feelings toward them. When these feelings are purified, or brought into the light, you are not dependent on other people to trigger negative emotions in you. Victimhood and codependency are no longer the pitfalls they once were.

Week 3: Bringing the Light to Your Body

(Stage of Transformation—Asana)

In the third week, you learn to apply awareness to your body, bringing light and lightness to how you sense your body. Yoga considers the body to be a vehicle for consciousness. Just as a boat carries you across the ocean, your body carries you across the ocean of experience. Everyone is already on that journey. But, at a subtler level, your body is carrying you to wholeness and your true self. Royal Yoga teaches you to appreciate this aspect, which unites body and mind in a mutual relationship, the bodymind.

Week 4: Vital Energy

(Stage of Transformation—Pranayama)

In the fourth week, you learn to connect your breath with every state of the bodymind. Royal Yoga considers the breath to be the carrier of life energy. This energy animates your cells and organs, and brings vitality to your thoughts and moods. At a subtle level, breathing in and out is the bridge between all of creation “out there” and every experience “in here.”

Week 5: Staying in the Light

(Stage of Transformation—Pratyahara)

In the fifth week, you learn to make the light your home base, no longer moving in and out of the light but always staying with it. Royal Yoga considers this the most significant transformation; it is like a second birth. A new existence opens. Realizing that you belong in the light, you now

accept without a doubt that being completely whole and healed is your birthright.

Week 6: The Power of Attention

(Stages of Transformation—Dharana, Dhyana, Samadhi)

In the sixth week, the final three limbs are combined because they serve a single theme: the power of attention. Simply by paying attention to any thought, impulse, desire, or goal, you cause it to be fulfilled. Royal Yoga considers that knowledge is power, and the deeper your knowledge of consciousness and how it operates, the more power you possess. But this isn't knowledge in the sense of information or education. It is inner knowing that depends upon nothing but living in the light. The creative power of consciousness is revealed.

If you want to, you can jump directly to Week 1 of the journey, whose theme is Social Intelligence. But I'd like to expand a little more on why Yoga is distinct as a unique method of self-transformation.

“CHANGE YOURSELF, CHANGE THE WORLD”

Royal Yoga works—this has been proven over the centuries—and the reason it works is radical. In fact, the basic principle of the whole Yoga system is so revolutionary, it seems highly improbable that anyone would pursue it. The principle is simply this: The world we think we live in is unreal. Like characters in a movie or a novel, we are living a fictional existence. Being unreal, this world we accept causes every kind of problem and suffering.

To return to your true self, you must understand how you got separated, or lost, in the first place. Yoga places the blame on *vrittis*, a Sanskrit word that literally means “whirlpools,” but that Yoga uses to describe every form of mental disturbance. The most revered text in Yoga is Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, a text containing 195 aphorisms (sutras) outlining in authoritative fashion the entire scope of Yoga in theory and practice. No teaching is more

important than the one concerning *vruttis*, which appears at the very outset of the book.

Here are the three opening sutras.

1. Now begins an exposition of Yoga.
2. Yoga is the cessation, or settling down, of the modifications of the mind (*vruttis*).
3. Then the knower is established in his own fundamental nature.

That's our entire journey in a nutshell. When the mind settles down into a quiet state, free from every kind of mental activity (*vrutti*), the true self is revealed. This is straightforward as a path to the ideal life. The radical part, which is quite explosive, is packaged inside the word *vrutti*, because, according to Yoga, every middle stage between you and your source is just a modification of the mind. The whole package of mind-made obstacles is known as *maya*, which is generally translated as "illusion," but includes distractions, deceptions, and mistaken thoughts and beliefs, all of which prevent us from experiencing the true self.

Is this a convincing way of looking at your life? It is undeniable that the mind creates suffering. The list of human troubles—war, crime, fear, depression, loneliness, suicide—is long and it belongs to no other living creature. It's the part about the world being unreal that stops everyone. "Walk in front of a bus," the skeptics scoff. "Then talk to me about how unreal everything is."

You might think there's no possible answer to that challenge. In fact, there is, and we'll come to it. Yoga isn't pointing to an illusion that will vanish in a puff of smoke. Buses, mountains, clouds, cities, and all other physical objects have their place, no matter what your worldview is. The unreality Yoga talks about runs deeper. It is a false foundation that undermines anything you try to build on it, like building a skyscraper on sand. No matter how beautiful, elaborate, and architecturally perfect the skyscraper is, resting it on a foundation of sand guarantees that it will topple.

We need Yoga if we want to put a secure foundation under our lives, because, if we don't, eventually we will pay a price in pain and suffering. If you want to base your life on reality instead of illusion, Yoga points to the bedrock of existence: consciousness. We do not actually live in the physical world, according to Yoga. We live in the world of experience, and every experience takes place in consciousness. Nothing is more basic.

The “real” reality is consciousness. That truth gives us a reliable starting point for being transformed. Next, we need the motivation to make us want to move forward. This is supplied by another radical idea: Change yourself, and you will change the world. You are the only agent of change that really counts. How do you create any change? By becoming more aware. The journey that takes us deeper into reality is worth taking, just because the more aware you are, the more things you can change—not just the world but your body, mind, emotions, beliefs, habits, indeed, anything you can think of.

Yoga is so radical, it overturns everything you and I have accepted since we were children. We've been chugging along year after year based on completely hollow beliefs and assumptions. Some beliefs matter more than others. These are known as “core beliefs,” and when your core beliefs are wrong and misguided, trouble is always brewing—if not today, then in some worrisome future. To bring them closer to home, I'll list the core beliefs we all take personally.

FALSE CORE BELIEFS

I don't really matter. I am small, ordinary, and insignificant.

I deserve only so much love. At heart, I am probably unlovable.

Life hasn't been fair to me. That's because life is unfair.

If I don't look out for number one, no one else will.

There is much to fear in this world. Self-protection is very important.

If I show anyone that I am vulnerable, they will take advantage. I need to seem strong and independent.

The forces of Nature are all-powerful. I will be fortunate if some natural disaster doesn't befall me.

The universe is a vast, cold, empty void. The Earth and everyone on it are less than a speck of dust, a product of random events going back to the Big Bang.

These beliefs undermine everyone's life. They are ingrained in us early on, and they have sunk so deep into our sense of self that they hardly deserve a second glance.

If you accept the unreality that Yoga rejects, your core beliefs will seem completely logical. Look around you or listen to the twenty-four-hour news cycle. Isn't life unfair? Don't each of us deserve only a limited amount of love? Isn't the Earth a speck of dust floating in a cold, empty void?

As you'll see over the next thirty days, Royal Yoga holds out an ideal life based on a new set of core beliefs. These are literally the opposite of the false core beliefs we have all been mistakenly living by.

TRUE CORE BELIEFS

Your existence is based on an infinite field of consciousness. It is your source.

Your true self has access to infinite possibilities.

At your source, you are connected to infinite love and bliss.

Your true self is immune to fear, depression, aging, and death.

You are always completely safe. There is nothing to worry about.

You have no need to project an image of strength and independence. You have no need to project any image at all.

The Earth and everything on it have a unique place in the tapestry of reality, woven by cosmic consciousness.

When people read these statements about an ideal life, they immediately assume they are merely someone else's beliefs, like the beliefs that underlie organized religion. Many would say that the entire issue of spirituality rests upon belief alone. It is impossible to accept Christianity unless you affirm the divinity of the resurrected Jesus, or so St. Paul declared in his letters to

the early churches. It is impossible to accept Buddhism unless you affirm the Buddha's enlightenment and the existence of Nirvana. In the same way, to accept Yoga, you must affirm your own infinite standing in creation. From the perspective of everyday life, this seems like too much to swallow.

But nothing about the ideal life is a belief akin to religious beliefs. What's at stake is reality. Beliefs pertain to how you *feel* about reality. Yoga declares as a fact that every human being is embedded in a field of infinite potential. By squeezing our infinite potential down into small, manageable compartments, we are guilty only of being part of the mainstream of human beings. But Yoga doesn't care about the mainstream or about how you have lived in the past. In the worldview of Yoga, the infinite is always with us; in fact, it is our source. Nothing we do to squeeze our lives down to a manageable size has the slightest effect on reality, and the highest reality is what Royal Yoga is ultimately all about.