

A 30-Day Journey into Christian Yoga

Faith
with a
Twist

Hillary D. Raining & Amy Nobles Dolan

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A Word from the Authors

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.
—Matthew 11:27-29

We live in an interesting time for organized religion. Judging by the current trends and data, more and more people identify with the “spiritual but not religious” label and have turned to contemplative practices like yoga to bring them into closer relationship with God. *Faith with a Twist: A 30-Day Journey into Christian Yoga* seeks to connect the spiritual and religious by blending the ancient wisdom of the church and the ancient spiritual practice of yoga.

Frequently, attempts to blend yoga and Christianity fail to do justice to both traditions—sacrificing the wisdom of one tradition for the other. In this way, each discipline tends to be watered down. Building upon our vocations as an Episcopal priest and a yoga teacher and trainer, we seek to weave the traditional eight limbs of yoga together with the church’s understanding and emphasis on living a holy life. Our prayer is that this approach presents a unique blend of spiritual practices and religious wisdom that will encourage and nourish the body, mind, and soul of the yoga novice and the experienced practitioner alike. We have purposefully included both traditional poses and modified, chair-based poses because we believe yoga is a practice available to everyone, regardless of age or physical ability.

Connecting our deeply rooted Christian faith with our love of yoga, we have created this 30-day journey as a guide for those seeking to grow in their love of God. This book offers a different prayer, reflection, and practice for each day of a month-long journey. In addition to the core meditation material, we include ways to use this resource in different seasons of the church year—and different seasons of your lives. Yoga has deepened our faith, and we hope this book full of prayers, wisdom, and practices helps transform your spiritual life.

Namaste,
Hillary & Amy

Using this Resource

Most of us have a hard time with stillness. We would rather move—run, climb, dance, and prance. Our ancient yoga teachers knew this, so they devised *asana* practice as a moving prayer—a series of motions designed to draw our awareness inward. Yoga is movement to create stillness—physical stillness that we are able to sustain in *savasana* and mental stillness throughout our practice and into our days.

Being faithful to Jesus and practicing yoga can go hand in hand. This guide incorporates vital elements of Christianity (including several beloved prayers from the Episcopal tradition) and provides context and explanation around the ancient spiritual wisdom of yoga. Each daily meditation includes prayers, reflections, and practices that are designed to be used every day for a month. Ideally, you will carve out 15-30 minutes to pray, read and reflect upon a meditation and practice yoga poses. Each day also offers a bit of yoga insight and tips. We encourage you to move through all sixteen poses each day, at your own pace. The series of poses is featured in the special full-color section, from pages 50-81.

A key principle of yoga will be explored in-depth for three days. Three is a powerful number in both Christianity and yoga. For Christians, the number corresponds to many important biblical teachings, notably in the three persons of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and in the three days that Jesus spent in the tomb before his resurrection. As Christians, we are called to love the Lord our God with mind, body, and soul. In yoga, three areas of attention (known in Sanskrit as *tristhana*) are a part of every movement—the breath (*pranayama*), the gazing point (*dristhi*), and the posture itself (*asana*). These three elements work together to purify or cleanse the mind, body, and soul.

On the first day, the reflection is a little longer as the concept is explained in depth. On this day, a verse of yoga scripture or *sutra* is included. These verses are from a book called *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjal (YS)*, written around 400 BCE and widely regarded as the foundational text of yoga. In addition to the original Sanskrit and literal translation, we have included our own understanding of each *sutra*. On the second day, we reflect on the same moral principle from a Christian perspective.

The third day is a little different. Both our Christian faith and our yoga practices have taught us that it is necessary and good to seek wisdom from scripture,

authors, and experienced teachers. There is also another rich way to study: the “inner teacher.” On the third day of each set of moral principles, we will tune into our inner teacher or to the Holy Spirit within. We have included open-ended prompts as an invitation to turn inward to reflect. This may include journaling or sitting in meditation, exploring how you personally understand, experience, and yearn to grow into each moral principle.

This workbook is perfect for individual use, group practice, or by religious communities looking to help members incorporate the principles and practice of yoga into their faith lives. Indeed, the month-long approach provides an excellent structure to this practice of blending faith and yoga. Thirty days is enough time to make (and break) a habit; we hope these thirty days can help you establish a habit that will support you for a lifetime.

We believe *Faith with a Twist* can enrich the most seasoned yoga practitioner and the yoga novice. The book is designed with adults in mind, but older youth and teens will enjoy this experiential way to pray. The book can also be a terrific resource for prayer groups, Bible and seasonal studies, and retreats. Participants should have their own copy of *Faith with a Twist* as a guide to which they return again and again.

The Appendix includes a glossary of terms as well as a guide for pronunciation. There are also suggestions on how to adapt these practices in other settings and seasons and a list of resources for additional study.

Although we perceive yoga as a spiritual practice and not exercise, it does require some physical exertion and movement. As with any new physical activity, you may wish to consult with a physician before you begin. If you are using a chair for the modified poses, we suggest selecting a sturdy one with arms. Make sure any cushion is firmly attached.

Sample Day

A typical *Faith with a Twist* session begins with a prayer, followed by a reflection and the setting of intentions, which leads directly into the physical postures and breath habits of the practice. Each session should end with a period of silence and total relaxation, allowing the Holy Spirit to refresh and refine you.

The lay-flat binding of the book allows you to place the resource on the ground near your mat or on a table. This enables you to easily follow the prayers, reflections, and poses each day.

Pray

Starting with prayer sets the tone for a practice that will stir your heart and soul. For the thirty-day period of this book, we have selected prayers from *Lesser Feasts and*

Fasts, The Book of Common Prayer, or other Episcopal prayer resources. You can also choose prayers that are particularly meaningful to you or your community. You may consider writing your own prayers, particularly as you embark on a second or third month of practice.

Reflect

These short reflections explore the moral principles of yoga and how faith guides our beliefs and responses. As we read and contemplate these meditations, we are asked to don a posture of humility and an openness to new paths.

The reflections invite you into a time of intention setting. Perhaps you are being called to give up something that might be distracting you from God or to take up a practice that will lead you into a deeper relationship. Perhaps you simply need to spend some time quietly digesting a new realization. Whatever your intentions, they will set the tone for your practice.

Practice

Using the special section as a guide, perform each of the postures slowly and with intention. Focus on your breathing. Be attentive to your body. Quiet your mind and open yourself to God.

Once you have finished practicing the active poses, you may be tempted to jump right back into your day. Instead, spend 10-15 minutes (as you are able) in *savasana*—corpse pose. Breathe comfortably and allow your experience to imprint itself in your mind and soul. Listen for the Holy Spirit in the rhythm of your breath, and be aware of the changes and new understandings you may discover in your body, mind, and soul. As you end, place your hands in prayer position over your heart and bow to your fellow students, teacher, and to God in thanksgiving for this time and growth and say “*Namaste*,” which means “the divine in me honors the divine in you.”



Authors Amy Nobles Dolan and Hillary D. Raining

Introduction

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? —1 Corinthians 6:19

In the United States, most people have been introduced to yoga through classes at health clubs and gyms. While it's wonderful these classes have brought yoga to so many, this method of introduction has framed the practice as merely (or primarily) exercise. Though yoga is great physical exercise, it is much more than that. The postures and principles that make up what we think of yoga were created as a spiritual practice some 3,000 years ago. Yoga is, at its deepest root, a spiritual practice, a tool to help people draw closer to God.

We are taught through our Christian faith to love God. Yoga teaches us to love ourselves as God's creation. For most of us, loving ourselves is much harder to do than loving God. Author and yoga leader Rolf Gates writes in his book, *Meditations from the Mat*, that a "spiritual practice is not about locking up all the unruly aspects of yourself, in the hope that they will never get free. Spiritual practice is about turning on the light—and the light is love."

The practice of yoga proposes to teach us to love all aspects of ourselves—not just the nice stuff that we're proud of but also the things we struggle with. We are to learn to love ourselves completely because God loves us completely. God doesn't love some perfected version of us that we might become one day. God loves us right here and right now—as we already are. Once we have embraced this fact (and, in doing so, have embraced ourselves), the next step is to love others even though they aren't perfect yet either.

As we lovingly accept one another for all that we are and all that we are not, we begin to live together as God intended. We begin to live into God's intention for this world. While we individual humans aren't perfect, love is. Through our love for ourselves and through our love for one another, we express the bit of God that abides in us. We allow that spark of God to shine through us in our lives.

This process isn't easy, and we need practices that can help guide us. Luckily, yoga traditions provide a wonderful structure to embrace and build our practice of loving God, ourselves, and others. Yoga offers a concise description of spiritual practice that includes two aspects: *abhyasa* (practice) and *vairagya* (renunciation). *Abhyasa* is the chance to practice habits and behaviors that we would like to develop in our real lives. Our yoga mats become laboratories where we test these things. Our mats are safe, contained places where we can experiment with how these habits and behaviors feel and with how hard or how surprisingly easy they are. Because we are practicing, it is, as a matter of course, okay to mess up. We just try again.

Vairagya (renunciation) focuses on taking what we practice or learn through yoga and applying it to our lives. Traditional definitions of *vairagya* can sound intimidating. They speak of shedding self-defeating behaviors; *vairagya* is seen as—to quote yoga master BKS Iyengar—"the elimination of all that hinders progress or refinement."

These explanations of renunciation can sound more daunting than inspiring, especially when we have become culturally conditioned to being overly critical or judgmental of one another and ourselves. The intention behind *vairagya* is not critical at all. Renunciation simply cannot be fully understood on its own—it needs to be unified with *abhyasa* (practice) to be accurately grasped. When we approach the two aspects of spiritual practice together, we are able to receive the deeper gifts of yoga.

There is no pressure or need to succeed—we have the freedom to practice all we want. The more we practice, the more these newly formed habits will become second nature. Almost before we realize it, we begin making the same changes on our mats and in our real lives. We come to shed self-defeating behaviors. We see obstacles to our progress more clearly and learn to gracefully navigate around them. That is simply the way yoga—and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit—works.

Once we start practicing (*abhyasa*) and assume the yoke of yoga, we will quickly discover the riches, comfort, and rest for our souls that our Christian spiritual practices offer in our daily lives. Once we experience those riches and comfort, continued commitment (*vairagya*) becomes easier, and we find that our burdens have become lighter.

As the well-known yoga teacher and Sanskrit scholar K. Pattabhi Jois said, "Practice, and all is coming."

The Foundations of a Spiritual Practice

I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words, and acts on them. That one is like a man building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when a flood arose, the river burst against that house but could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who hears and does not act is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the river burst against it, it fell, and great was the ruin of that house. —Luke 6:47-49

Every practice needs a foundation upon which to rest. This foundation supports and protects the practice. In any spiritual practice, yoga included, the foundation supports and protects the relationship we are developing with God.

Our time in *asana* (yoga postures) on our mats is the foundation for a healthy yoga practice. This can help us reinforce and—when needed—recreate the foundation of our spiritual practices. For some, a yoga practice and a Christian spiritual practice is one and the same. For others, a regular yoga practice is a wonderful model for how to construct a spiritual practice.

It is up to each of us to figure out what foundation we need to build in order to deepen our relationship with God. The critical point here is that we must make the choice and the commitment. Both intention and action are required on our part. The decision is totally personal. The choice is ours to make.

Once we make our decision and commitment, our practices can (and should) be open to change. Our practices should feel good. Our practices should fit into our lives. After all, at their fundamental (foundational!) level, our practices are manifestations of our relationship with God. While our relationship with God is always and forever present, the way it materializes in our lives changes over time. Our practices will ebb and flow in intensity with the twists and turns of our lives. The form our practices take is secondary. What is crucial is that we maintain commitment to our practice. That commitment is the rock on which the rest of our practice stands.

First Things First: Show Up!

*But you, take courage! Do not let your hands be weak,
for your work shall be rewarded. —2 Chronicles 15:7*

To benefit from any kind of practice, we have to show up. To increase the likelihood that we will show up, we need to schedule the practice into our days. For our purposes, this means setting aside time on our calendar for yoga. Because yoga is a spiritual practice, we are, in essence, making an appointment and showing up to meet with God. Creating this “appointment time” means figuring out and committing to a routine that works for you—you may unroll your mat once a week on a Thursday night or every morning. For a practice to work, for a true commitment to a practice to form, the practice must be customized to the rhythms of your life. It doesn’t matter how much you practice yoga but that you follow through with your commitment and appointment time with God.

Ch-ch-ch-Changes

*For everything there is a season, and a time for every
matter under heaven... —Ecclesiastes 3:1*

- 16 • Yes, commitment is important, but we also must be flexible. Life is change, and nothing stays the same. If our practice becomes a burden when life veers in a new direction, we need to change it or we will eventually stop practicing, no matter how strong our will.

Faith with a Twist

For our yoga practice, this means that on some days, we may only squeeze in 15 minutes on the mat, while on other days we will have plenty of time to move. And sometimes, we will flop down into *savasana* (resting pose at the end of practice) after dragging ourselves through a brief series of standing poses and call it a day.

The same is true with our prayer lives. Some days, we will have a rich and wonderful conversation with God, and on other days, we might feel disconnected and alone. Be open to changes both in how you pray and how you practice. There is no single right way for everyone at every time. While we recommend embracing different prayers and practices, we urge you to remain firm in your faithfulness to these principles. Committing to prayer and practice—even as they take different shapes and forms—provides strength and support for our everyday lives. There is a lot of grace and mercy in prayer and practice, and it all counts.

We Give, and We Receive

The one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.
—2 Corinthians 9:6

If we want to receive more benefits from our yoga practice, then we can increase the energy and focus we pour into it. In Sanskrit, this is called *tapas*, which translates as zeal. *Tapas* is the fire that drives us. In *asana* practice, we bring *tapas* to the mat, but we also carry this zeal with us into the rest of our day. This should be true of any spiritual practice, especially prayer.

The benefits we reap are the reason we return regularly to our practice. If what we're doing in our spiritual practice feels like all work and no reward, then we need to re-think it. We need to listen to ourselves and respect our needs. As long as our prayers and practice come from our deepest hearts and are motivated by a desire to find connection to God, we can (and should) trust them.

Climbing the Learning Curve

May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience. —Colossians 1:11

Sometimes, the tools of our practice are hard to master at first. We have to devote serious time and energy to climbing a learning curve before we can truly settle into the practice.

The same is true for most any discipline we undertake. At first, any new practice may seem like hard work, but in time and with dedication it becomes natural and fits gracefully into our lives. Once we start seeing the benefits and experiencing the rewards, it's easy to stay motivated to stick with the practice. The initial period of learning is the toughest.

It helps to make a real commitment to try a new thing for a set (and reasonable) length of time. Making a deliberate decision and finite commitment provides the time and space to really experience a practice before you feel moved to judge it. With thirty days of prayer, reflection, and practice, this book is designed to give you the space and time to experience and discern whether it's the right method for you.

At the Root of It All, a Word

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. —John 1:1

In nearly every yoga class, practice is closed with the word and gesture of *namaste*. One definition of *namaste* stands out as the perfect summation of what we are doing when we practice yoga. This definition is: “The God in me greets the God in you,” or “The divine in me greets the divine in you.” Here we are back at the foundation of our practice! We begin by seeking the divine within ourselves through our practice. We end up, having journeyed through our practice, recognizing the divine within us all.

Sometimes when you’re pondering a broad topic, a single, small element beautifully encapsulates the spirit of the whole. In yoga, the greeting *namaste* does just this. Aadil Palkhivala writes that *namaste* “is an acknowledgement of the soul in one by the soul in another.” The simple, heartfelt gesture of *namaste* sums up the deepest gift that yoga offers—we are all God’s creatures living out God’s will on earth.

Practicing yoga alongside our faith teaches us to pause and consider the idea of *namaste* as we interact with each other. This loving-kindness makes our days brighter and our relationships more rewarding.

Mind, Spirit, AND Body

Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul. —3 John 1:2

One aspect that sets yoga apart from other spiritual practices is its incorporation of the physical. Spirituality, at least for us in the United States, tends to be reserved for our intellects and our hearts. By incorporating the body into a spiritual practice, yoga makes it natural to incorporate spirituality into our daily, active lives. Yoga is a tool that helps us move our spiritual lives from the intangible to the tangible.

For many of us, when we first recognize a craving to develop a spiritual self, it is hard to figure out how to bring our faith and relationship to God out of church and into the “real world.” With its emphasis on the body, yoga helps expand our faith from the mind and heart to body and actions.

Scripture explores this expansion of faith into life. In 1 John 3:18, we read, “Let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.” Showing up in church on Sundays or kneeling down to pray once a day are only the first steps to developing a full spiritual life with practices that support and strengthen us in our real-world lives. Most of us need spiritual practices that help us incorporate our faith into everything we do during the course of our day, from working on a project to talking with a friend or caring for a child.

We are always in our body. We are always breathing and moving. Practicing yoga helps us connect our physical actions to our spiritual yearnings and intentions. We learn to live our faith all the time. Yoga starts with the body—the way we carry ourselves, the way we breathe—for just this reason.

When we practice yoga, we are learning to yoke—to connect—our minds, bodies, and spirits. We are not created to be purely intellectual or purely emotional or purely physical. We can only live into our fullest selves by developing all of these aspects of ourselves.

The Yamas and Niyamas

Do not forsake her, and she will keep you; love her, and she will guard you. The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever else you get, get insight.
—Proverbs 4:6-7

This book focuses on three of yoga’s eight limbs (or components): the *yamas*, the *niyamas*, and *asana*. While the Sanskrit names sound exotic, the practices themselves are quite accessible. *Asana* is the name for the yoga postures we do on our mats. The *yamas* and *niyamas* focus on principles to help guide our relationships with others and with ourselves.

The *yamas* and *niyamas* can serve as a bridge between our yoga mats and our lives. They help bring our faith out of Sunday morning worship and into every day of the week.

The Yamas

The *yamas* make up half of yoga’s moral code. The Sanskrit word of *yamas* is typically translated as “moral restraints.” However, the word restraint sounds, well, restrictive! Instead, think of the *yamas* as practices that help keep our actions in line with our hopes or intentions for the ways we want to live. When we allow the *yamas* to

serve as the foundations for our actions, we find ourselves in a better place in our relationships and even with ourselves.

The five *yamas* are:

- *ahimsa* (nonviolence)
- *satya* (truthfulness)
- *asteya* (non-stealing)
- *bramacarya* (moderation)
- *aparigraha* (non-possessiveness or non-hoarding)

These principles are not unique to yoga; in fact, the *yamas* reflect the very heart of the Christian faith. In Ephesians, Paul describes how to live a life of faith. In the passage below, we have noted in brackets how Paul's words correlate with yoga's *yamas*. Our Christian faith can be strengthened through abiding by the *yamas*, these moral restraints.

So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another [satya]. Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil [bramacarya and aparigraha]. Thieves must give up stealing [asteya]; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy [aparigraha]. Let no evil talk come out of your mouths [ahimsa], but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear...Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another [aparigraha], as God in Christ has forgiven you. —Ephesians 5:17-32

The Niyamas

The five *niyamas* make up the second half of yoga's moral code. They are:

- *sauca* (purity)
- *santosa* (contentment)
- *tapas* (zeal)
- *svadhyaya* (self-study)
- *isvara-pranidhana* (devotion to God)

The Sanskrit word *niyamas* is traditionally defined as "observances." Practicing the *niyamas* supports the changes that we've made in our lives by the *yamas*. The *niyamas* provide an instruction manual of sorts. They essentially describe how to put into action the beliefs expressed in the *yamas*. The *niyamas* take us from the conceptual to the actual. The *niyamas* describe how to bring our spirituality into our real-world lives.

The *niyamas* are practices that have been found, over thousands of years, to support the individual who has chosen a spiritual path. Sharath Jois, in his book *Astanga Yoga Anusthana*, defines the *niyamas* as commitments we make to ourselves. That's worth repeating and considering. They are commitments we make to ourselves—they are not imposed on us or required of us. The *niyamas* are yoga's invitation to choose a different path in life. They are yoga's invitation to draw closer to God every single day.

As you work through this guide, it will become clear that the *yamas* and *niyamas* are braided together and support one another. For example, a practice of *sauca* (purity or cleanliness) requires an element of *satya* (truthfulness) and *tapas* (passion or zeal). In order to recognize that you've made a mess of something (whether tangible or intangible), you must be clear-eyed and honest with yourself. You also must apply yourself with determination and zeal to the work of cleaning up after yourself.

A Practice of Transformation

This is what I have seen to be good: it is fitting to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of the life God gives us; for this is our lot. —Ecclesiastes 5:18

Yoga has a curious, circular nature. Each limb is like a spoke on a wheel. Each spoke serves to make the whole practice stronger. We can work on each limb within our practices of any of the other limbs. Working with our bodies on our mats in *asana* provides a wonderful laboratory to experiment and practice with the moral teachings of yoga before applying them in real life. After all of this practice, putting these moral tenets to use in our daily life becomes second nature.

Our physical practice helps to weave these moral tenets into the very cloth of who we are. We will still face challenges and have obligations and chores, good days and bad. The adoption of a spiritual practice like yoga isn't a lucky coin or panacea. Rather, spiritual practices transform our approach to life. An old Zen saying reinforces this point: "Before enlightenment, I chopped wood and carried water. After enlightenment, I chopped wood and carried water."

We can't control what life brings our way. We can only control our response to the chances and changes of life. A spiritual disciple of prayer, reflection, and practice can help us find enjoyment even in toil and tribulation and to discover deeper meaning in all we do.

Day 1

Ahimsa/Nonviolence

Pray

Eternal God, in whose perfect kingdom no sword is drawn but the sword of righteousness, no strength known but the strength of love: So mightily spread abroad your Spirit, that all peoples may be gathered under the banner of the Prince of Peace, as children of one Father; to whom be dominion and glory, now and forever. Amen. —The Book of Common Prayer

Reflect

The concept of *ahimsa* asks us to embrace nonviolence at the levels of speech, thought, and action. It means not causing harm to other living beings. Violence is a loaded word, isn't it? It makes us think of guns, beatings, and warfare. It is important that we stretch beyond this understanding of what it means to commit acts of violence.

Violence can take on many forms. Some forms of violence are obvious. Others are less obvious. For instance, unkind words can hurt feelings, destroy self-esteem, undermine confidence, and radically change the direction of an individual's life or the life of a relationship.

Some forms of violence are even sneakier. Thoughts fall squarely into this category. We all maintain an inner dialogue as we evaluate and judge our actions over the course of the day. It's not uncommon for people to be totally unconscious of this audio loop in our heads. And sometimes, we are not kind to ourselves. Chances are, our inner voice may be among the cruelest voices we will ever hear. We can wreak violence on ourselves, and this kind of self-violence is deeply damaging. This is a habit or pattern that we need to notice. And, by noticing it, we can begin to change it.

Today as you practice, notice how you treat your body and the words you are saying about yourself while on your mat. Are you pushing yourself too hard in a way that might lead to injury? Are you being overly critical of your perceived lack of progress to obtain a goal you had hoped you would reach by now? Today's invitation is to end this violence—whether it be on your mat or in the world—by ending it first in yourself.

Practice

Turn to page 50 and move through the sun salutation and other poses. As you practice, consider the principle of *ahimsa*. When we are nonviolent, others around us will cease to be hostile. That's a big promise, isn't it? Can we really change the world by changing our own behavior? Jesus thought so. Gandhi thought so, too. So did Martin Luther King Jr., Mother Teresa, Rosa Parks, and Nelson Mandela, to name just a few.

When we go through life with an awareness of the ways our words, thoughts, and deeds could potentially harm others or ourselves, the feelings of love and connectedness that arise are astounding. As we begin to practice, we should be aware of the ripple effect of each thought, word, and deed. Practicing *ahimsa* helps us reject the illusion of separateness and accept the reality that we are all deeply connected to one another. As we practice *ahimsa*, we move ever closer to the understanding that we are enacting love when we practice nonviolence. This love is the tie that binds us all together.



Ahimsapratisthayam tat sannidhau vairatyagah YS2:35
When we live nonviolently, those around us cease to be violent.

Day 2

Ahimsa/Nonviolence

Pray

Most holy God, the source of all good desires, all right judgments, and all just works: Give to us, your servants, that peace which the world cannot give, so that our minds may be fixed on the doing of your will, and that we, being delivered from the fear of all enemies, may live in peace and quietness; through the mercies of Christ Jesus our Savior. Amen.

—*The Book of Common Prayer*

Reflect

Peacefulness or nonviolence encompasses much of Jesus' message to his followers. Nonviolence is at the foundation of Jesus' greatest commandment, "Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." In other words, living responsible, moral lives—living as good citizens—requires that we do not hurt one another.

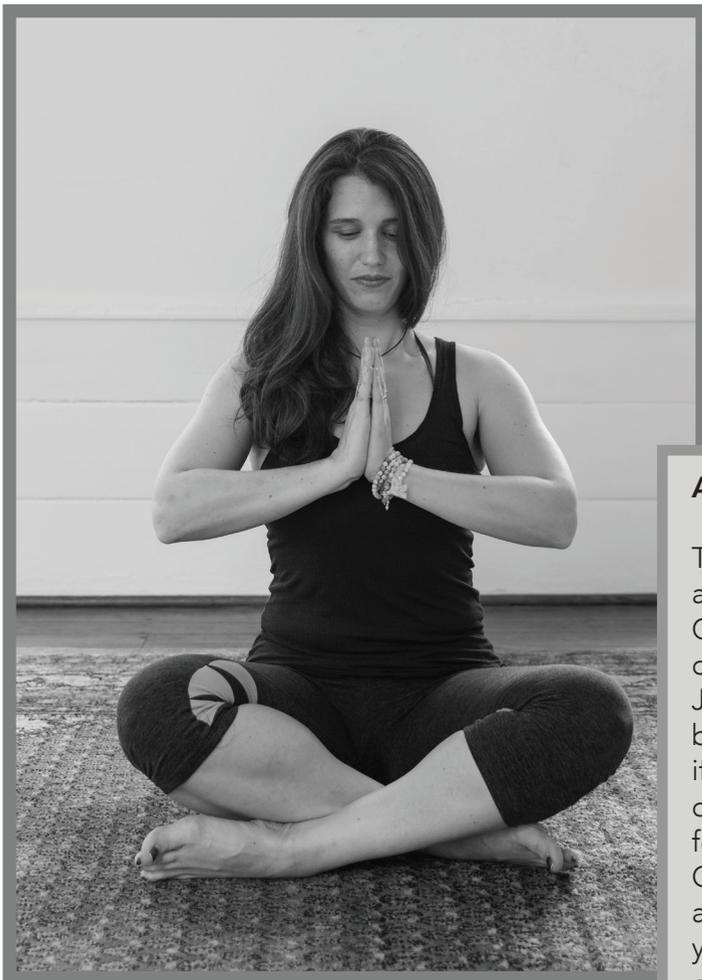
Jesus did not simply talk about peace—he lived it. So often, when Jesus was approached by people who wanted him to be a militaristic messiah, one who came to liberate his people with a mighty sword, he gave them an answer of an all-encompassing love rather than a call to violence. He pointed to God's desire to save and free all people through him rather than a desire for gold or riches or power that would come at the price of leaving others suffering or in want.

For Jesus, the only reign he would usher in was one of peace, free from the violence we so readily inflict on one another. By commanding us to love one another, Jesus is telling us that we are to take up his call to nonviolence and to spread peace and love in his name.

Practice

One of the ways we can begin to spread this kind of love is through prayer and peaceful actions such as yoga. As you move through the poses on pages 50-81, spend some time thinking about the peace and the love that you could spread in all ways. For example, on the mat, you might practice this intention by approaching a posture you hate with gratitude for the way your body will change through it. Spend a few extra moments in this posture, breathing love into the frustration you have with it.

Or as you find yourself having violent thoughts, actions, or words off the mat, remember that if your first lens is one of love, you will be less inclined to choose violence as a responsive action. Take the same calming breaths before reacting to invite love and peace into your heart at that moment.



A Few Deep Breaths

The opening breaths of your practice are very important and very powerful. Close your eyes. Tune out all outside distractions. (We know. This feels weird.) Just breathe. Try not to change your breathing. Simply observe it. Notice if you are inhaling or exhaling. What does each breath feel like? Can you feel the cool air as your breath flows in? Can you feel the warmth of your breath as you exhale? Have you noticed that your mind has slowed down and your emotions have smoothed out, all as a result of simply focusing on your breath? This is just a taste of the power of mindful breathing.

Day 3

Ahimsa/Nonviolence

Pray

O God, you manifest in your servants the signs of your presence: Send forth upon us the Spirit of love, that in companionship with one another your abounding grace may increase among us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. —The Book of Common Prayer

Reflect

As we mentioned in the introduction, we will spend three days on each yoga principle. One day we will look at it through a yogic lens, one day through a Christian lens, and the third day through the personal lens of experience. Today is the first of those introspective days, and you are invited to spend time reflecting on what the Holy Spirit is doing in your life. We have provided a prompt for contemplation and invite you to journal on how your soul and practice have been opened up by each principle.

Reflect upon these two famous quotations, one from Jesus as he delivered the Sermon on the Mount and the other from Martin Luther King Jr., whose embrace of nonviolent protest inspired a nation.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.—Matthew 5:9

God, help us as individuals and as a world to hear it now before it is too late: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and God's justice and all these other things shall be added unto you."—Martin Luther King Jr.

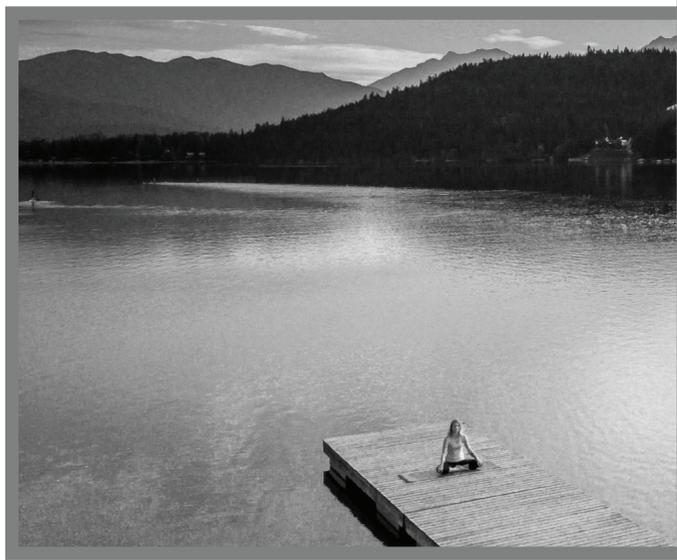
How could you bring more *ahimsa* into your practice? How could you bring more of it into the world?

Practice

On this final day centered on *ahimsa*, consider practices that you can use to focus on Christ's commandment to love, in your life on and off the mat. Here are three suggestions:

- Today, when you notice yourself having harsh thoughts about something you've said or done, spend a moment editing these thoughts into a kinder version.
- During your practice, every time you inhale deeply, allow that breath to fill you with a healing feeling. Allow each exhale to serve as a release of any negativity you find within your heart or mind.
- Explore your own experiences with *ahimsa* in your journal.

You may have other practices that you would like to exercise as you embrace the principle of *ahimsa*/nonviolence. However you strive to live out this principle, invite Jesus to be with you in this endeavor to live spiritually.



Holding Still Is Hard to Do

It is a bit of a paradox that all the movement of yoga is designed to teach us to hold still, inside and out. If you feel jumpy as you begin, you're not alone. Most of us struggle mightily to hold still, especially when we have been told to hold still! Trust us here. Your practice will take care of your need to fidget. When you reach *savasana* or resting pose at the end of your practice and enter into meditation, you will be surprised at how willing your body is to truly, deeply rest. Your still body will serve as a roadmap for your mind as it journeys toward its own stillness.

Daily Practice

Surya Namaskar A Sun Salutations

The sun salutations are a series of movements designed to set the rhythm of your practice, to draw your mind inward, and to warm up your muscles. We recommend that you begin your daily practice with three to five sun salutations, and then move into the other poses.

Within the sun salutations, the only posture that you hold for five breaths is downward facing dog. You will flow through all of the others, giving each one breath as indicated.



Inhale: Reach up and draw your palms together.

Exhale: Fold forward, bringing your palms to the floor. Your knees can be as bent as they need to be.

If you're practicing in a chair, fold forward over your legs and let your head hang loosely.



We encourage you to move through the poses on pages 50-81 every day. You may choose to practice the traditional yoga postures on the left or the modified ones on the right—or a mix of the two. Listen to your body, mind, and spirit as you practice.

A video of the authors practicing these poses can be found online at www.thehiveapiary.com



Inhale: Lift halfway, draw your shoulders away from your ears.

Exhale: Step backward to high plank. Your knees can be on or off the floor depending on your strength.





If you are practicing in a chair, leave your hands by your feet, then lengthen your back and gaze forward with your hands beside your thighs. Instead of a plank, lift up your breastbone so you are sitting as upright as possible.

