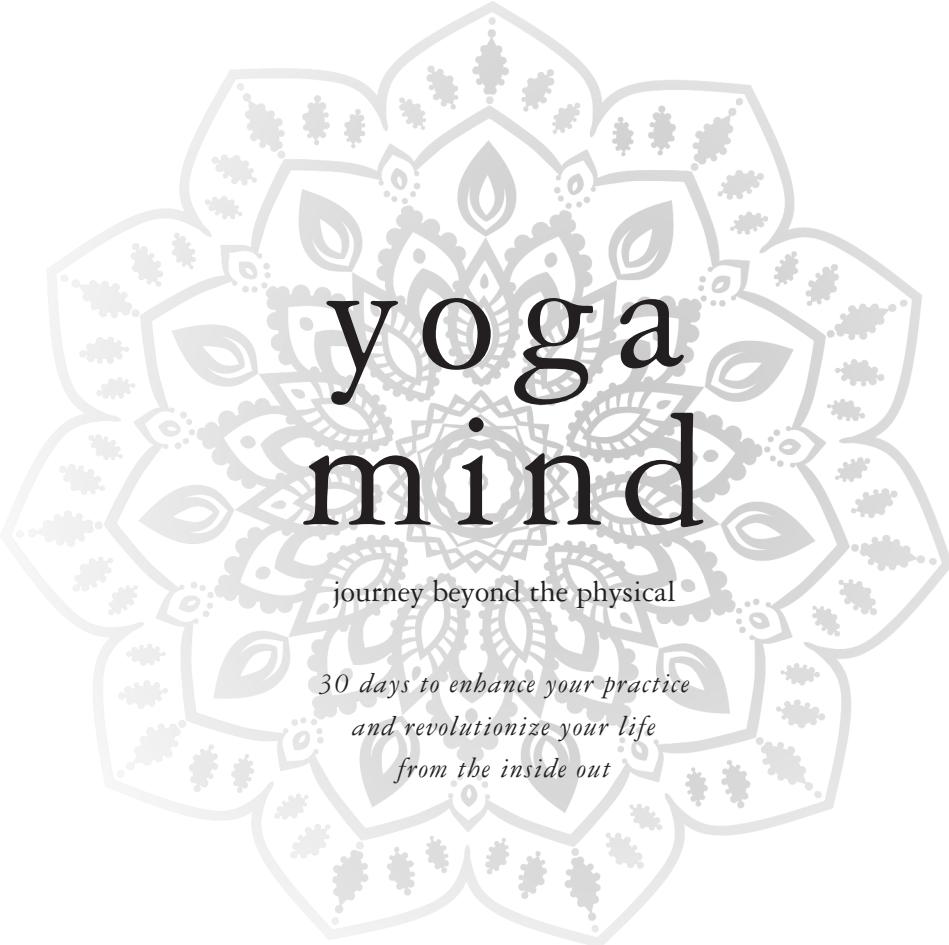


journey beyond
the physical

yoga mind

30 days to enhance your practice and revolutionize
your life from the inside out

Suzan Colón



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You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf.

—Sri Swami Satchidananda

i n t r o d u c t i o n

take a deep breath

O kay, you can come in now.”

I looked up at Francesco’s sister, her face pale and thin with worry, and I tried to set my own expression into something normal. I wasn’t sure what, exactly, normal might be, under the circumstances.

A few weeks earlier, my friend Francesco Clark had taken a joyful dive into a pool and broken his neck. He’d gone from being an able-bodied person to being a quadriplegic in less than a breath. Somehow he’d survived the shattering of his vertebrae and nearly drowning, then being transported by medical helicopter to a trauma center—a lifesaving measure that also carried the risk of splintered bones severing more spinal nerves with even the slightest movement. As doctors raced Fran into surgery to stabilize his spine and relieve the pressure in his neck that was slowly suffocating him, they called his parents so he could say good-bye in case he didn’t live through the seven-hour operation. His mother, on vacation with his father and sister in

Florida, told Fran he would be all right, hung up the phone, and collapsed.

But Francesco did survive the operation, and the trauma, both physical and emotional, that came with his accident. By surviving, he created a new plane of relativity: the blessings within a curse. Now, after weeks in the ICU, he was well enough to receive visitors other than a priest and next of kin.

I not only wanted to see him; after his near-death experiences I felt a desperate *need* to see my friend in the flesh, to see for myself that he was truly alive. But now it felt as though I couldn't move from the hospital waiting room chair. I knew he'd be changed; he would likely be in a wheelchair. But how else had this grave situation affected him? I was afraid of how different he'd be compared to the last time I'd seen him.

Francesco and I met in 2001 while working at *Mademoiselle* magazine, where he was the assistant to the entertainment editor, Geri Richter Campbell. I was an editor-at-large, writing cover stories on celebrities. Geri had hired Fran straight out of college and spent the days leading up to his start date bragging about her new model-handsome assistant who spoke three languages. After he began working with us, Geri and I both proudly announced that we had a new best friend/little brother. Fran was a combination of well-traveled worldliness and wide-eyed-kid excitement. He could be sophisticated one minute and goofy the next, witty and clever while entirely unjaded. Everyone at the magazine predicted that he'd be running a major empire before he was thirty and yet would remain a total sweetheart. When *Mademoiselle* folded a month after the September 11 terrorist attacks on the

World Trade Center, Geri, Fran, and I all pinky-swore that we'd stay in touch. Then, like everyone else, we got really busy.

Catch-up dates were planned and rescheduled endlessly. (This was before Facebook, where keeping in touch would've meant liking one another's posts.) Somehow a whole year went by. Then one afternoon I got a frantic call from Geri telling me Fran had nearly died. The details spilled out of her in a trembling ramble—he dove into a pool, it was dark, it was the shallow end, he couldn't see, he broke his neck, he's paralyzed—and I sank to the floor as I wept, thinking, *Why didn't I try harder to see him?*

I'd learned when I was a child that life could pull a devastating vanishing act. During one of their nightly calls, my nana told my mother she'd see us that coming weekend as usual, signed off with love, and quietly had an aneurysm. One minute there, the next minute gone. The lesson was buried in my marrow. As I grew up, my feelings toward people close to me careened between intense gratitude for having them and numb terror over losing them. I resolved that I would see Francesco as soon as the hospital would allow it.

Now that I was finally able to see him, I couldn't move, and the mild scent of hospital antiseptic was trapped in my held breath. What scared me was not imagining the physical changes Fran would have undergone after this catastrophic accident, but that *he*, his essence and core, might have been broken as well.

After a moment I got to my feet and followed Fran's sister, Charlotte, into his room. Their parents and grandmother stood in a huddle looking downward, which is what you do when a person is not on eye level because he's sitting in a wheelchair. As

Charlotte and I came into the room, the family turned toward us. Their faces were gray with the still-fresh shock of having nearly lost Francesco, ironically to a single carefree moment: at the start of a holiday weekend, with an exciting new job beginning the following week and the sense that the coming years would be as great as the previous twenty-four had been, Fran had taken a leap . . .

“Heyyyy!” Francesco gave me his usual huge grin, now incongruous in this fluorescent-lit hospital room so heavy with emotion. Normally he would’ve bounded over and given me one of his huge, happy-puppy hugs. But now he was motionless in the wheelchair, his arms and legs carefully arranged in resting positions. A thick brace encased his torso and held up his head, immobilizing his spine while his cracked vertebrae healed. His body was unnaturally still; my brain understood what had happened, but my visceral reaction was *No, this isn’t right.* As I took all this in, I felt my own legs becoming unstable.

I wasn’t sure what to do next. Was it okay to hug him? That thick body brace said no. I took his hand and felt my stomach go cold when I realized he couldn’t feel my fingers grasping his. *What do I do?* Glowing coals of nervousness flared brighter, and the first thing that came into my mind fell out of my mouth.

“Stupid question,” I said, “but how are you?”

“Actually, I’m great,” Fran said immediately, and oh thank God, his usual optimism was intact. “Did you know I nearly died? I’m really lucky to be here.”

His surprising perspective gave the moment the quality of an exhalation of relief. The feeling was not unlike bracing for

more turbulence in a plane and then finding the rough clouds have passed to allow for smooth travel. Either to avoid further awkwardness or because he didn't want to talk about his accident, Fran said, "How are *you* doing? Wait, didn't I hear you just graduated from a yoga teacher training course?"

Now I did have to sit down, not only to bring myself to eye level with Fran, but because a thought that had been lurking in the back of my mind suddenly attacked me. Yes, I had just graduated from yoga teacher training. For the past four months, I'd been immersed in all aspects of yoga—how to teach asana (the physical poses) and learning about yoga's philosophy and spirituality. I could now instruct classrooms full of beginner-level students in poses ranging from simple cross-legged sitting positions to challenging twists, balances, and even shoulder stands. I'd taken this training so I could help people feel as good as I did when I practiced yoga. Now a friend whose place in my heart was impervious to time and distance needed help. But Francesco couldn't move anything except his face, to smile with hope. How could I, a newly minted yoga teacher, possibly help him?

The spiritual tools of yoga provided the answer.



Like most people, I thought yoga was a form of exercise—those twisty, bendy, gymnastic postures performed by young, lithe women (and the occasional man). About a decade before the accident that left Francesco unable to move, I'd started looking into yoga because I really needed to move. As a longtime writer for magazines including *O, The Oprah Magazine; Harper's*

Bazaar; and *Good Housekeeping*, as well as the author of several books, I spent most of my days sitting at a desk. We've recently heard a great deal about the unhealthy effects of sitting for long periods of time, but back then, I was my own case study: everything hurt. I knew I needed exercise, as well as some form of stress reduction that would help me deal with the pressures of work and life in general. Yoga, I'd heard, offered both.

Integral Yoga Institute wasn't far from where I lived, and I'd passed by the peach-colored building in New York City's West Village hundreds of times over the years. One day I walked in, and just entering the reception area felt like taking a deep, relaxing breath. The people working there and the students checking in for classes all seemed so *calm*. Soothing pastel hues began on the walls of the bookstore; led upstairs to studios named Lavender, Aqua, Gold, Lotus, and Heaven; and continued throughout a building that was not just a yoga studio but an ashram, a place where people lived while they studied yoga.

The quiet, mellow environment helped relax muscles I didn't realize were tense, even before the yoga class began. Once the teacher began leading us through a breathing exercise, during which I took fuller, more substantive breaths than I could recall taking in some time, I had an unexpected reaction: I began to weep with relief. I hadn't realized how much stuff—stress, emotions, thoughts of the past, worries about the future—I'd been holding in, until yoga showed me how to safely release it.

The far more common reaction to being in an Integral Yoga class is a happy sigh and a soft smile. Shoulders loosen away from ears, eyes previously laser-focused on phones drift closed,

and you can feel the students' stress melting away. And that's before they've done a single pose.

As a student at Integral Yoga, then as a teacher and eventually a teacher trainer, I've learned that yoga is much, much more than just the poses, or asana. This ancient Eastern practice has its own philosophy, ethical principles, and tools that form a design for living.

Yet here in the West, the primary focus is on yoga's physical practice. That was my primary focus, too; it's through the door of asana that most people discover yoga's bigger picture. It wasn't until Francesco's accident that I began to truly understand that yoga is a wide and welcoming spiritual path, one that anybody, regardless of age, religion, or physical ability, can walk—even if they can't walk at all.

In order to understand the tools of yoga and begin to see how useful they can be, it helps to have some background information. Yoga, like Buddhism, is not a religion. It can be compared in a general sense to philosophy or spirituality in that people of any religion can, and do, make use of yoga's secular tools. Both yoga and Buddhism were born thousands of years ago in India, where the Sanskrit word *yoga* means "union"—union with something greater than ourselves, union of body and mind through breathing, union that comes when we release the false idea of aloneness that creates harmful feelings and habits and come to understand that we are all connected. Yogic sages, people who were dedicated to helping others attain a higher level of living, created a combination of breathing practices, accessible approaches to meditation, philosophy and ethics, physical

exercise, and spiritual tools to navigate life with courage, serenity, joy, good health, compassion, and grace.

Today, an estimated thirty-six million people in America engage in some form of yoga. Because it is so effective at reducing stress, it is constantly being adapted for different populations and different needs. Yoga has gone from studios to corporate boardrooms, schools, hospitals, rehabilitation centers, and more. The CEOs and employees of Fortune 500 companies do it, as do children in high-crime areas, veterans returning from wars, seniors in elder-care centers . . . And the list of those who are experiencing the stress-relieving, health-giving benefits of yoga is growing all the time.

Yet this is still not all that yoga is, or can be. Yoga goes well beyond a form of physical exercise; it's a spiritual toolkit we can use in all areas of our lives, every day—and not just for the hour or so we're on the mat. You can think of yoga as an ancient spiritual technology for wellness and well-being. It has survived for thousands of years and has become more widespread and popular in our modern times for one reason: it works. Its tools are not only relevant today, they're more necessary than ever in our constantly changing, stress-filled times. And you don't have to do the physical asana practice in order to gain incredible benefit from using yoga's tools. My friend Francesco, who couldn't move at all, was one of the best yoga students I ever had.

He was also one of the greatest yoga teachers I will ever have. Through Francesco, the tools of yoga and their potential for subtle but powerful life shifts came vividly alive, and I came to understand that yoga isn't something you do. It's something

you live, practicing each day, so that you can become the best version of yourself.

This was the vision of Swami Satchidananda, the founder of Integral Yoga, where I studied and became a yoga teacher. Born in India in 1914, Swami Satchidananda (whose name translates from Sanskrit as “truth, knowledge, bliss”) was asked by artist Peter Max and filmmaker Conrad Rooks to come to America in the late 1960s, a time of deep social turmoil—protests, rioting, racism, rampant drug use. It doesn’t sound all that different from today.

The swami spoke about yoga’s tools to people hungry for positive change, for themselves and for the world. Swami Satchidananda’s message of peace had such a profound impact on people that he was brought by helicopter to the Woodstock music festival to give an opening address that would calm the swelling crowds. The event, attended by over four hundred thousand, continued peacefully over four days.

The swami, affectionately called Gurudev (“beloved teacher”), made world peace his life’s work, and his message of “Easeful body, peaceful mind, useful life” had wide-ranging influence. He met with Pope Paul VI, the Dalai Lama, President George H. W. Bush, and President Bill Clinton. He was a guest speaker at the international religious assembly for the United Nations Special Session on Disarmament. His whole-life teachings of yoga influenced the groundbreaking heart-disease-reversal work of Dean Ornish, MD; the Commonweal Cancer Help Program formulated by Michael Lerner, MD; and other current whole-being health care systems. Dr. Wayne Dyer said of Swami Satchidananda, “He helped me to raise my consciousness

to a place of being more peaceful, more loving.” Swami Satchidananda’s interpretation of yoga, designed to be as accessible as possible to all who need it, has touched the lives of countless people, including me and Francesco. And now, you.



We know why we should practice physical yoga—to have a healthy, flexible body. But why do we need a flexible Yoga Mind? Why has yoga been a predominantly spiritual practice for thousands of years, and why is it so necessary for our lives right now?

Yoga gives us the opportunity to live our lives more fully, deeply, authentically, and organically. Its spiritual tools teach us to recognize and get past obstacles that hold us back. They make broad concepts like mindfulness and meditation simpler, able to fit into our busy days and lives. They help us deal with long-standing issues that cause suffering, and enhance the present moment. They help us make subtle shifts that lead to lasting change. And because, simply put, sometimes everything is not going to be okay.

Life challenges happen to everyone. There are a multitude of different types—illness, job loss, divorce, you name it. In these situations, it’s just not “all good,” and if some well-meaning person says, “Everything happens for a reason,” our reaction is less soothed and maybe even more upset, wondering what kind of world we live in if that could be true.

At the time I found Integral Yoga, I was not aware that I was reaching for an ideal of life where everything was perfect—when, someday, I’d have the perfect job, the perfect home, the

perfect relationship, the perfect body, and on and on. Yoga, and particularly Integral Yoga, offered something far more realistic and attainable: balance.

This ashram full of vibrant people of all kinds, including those with injuries, illnesses, frailties that come with age, and varying abilities, even a teacher in a wheelchair and a vision-impaired student (Integral was the only yoga studio that would allow her service dog in the building), was an example of real life. Things happen, and we can work with them. Swami Sat-chidananda knew that yoga could help us achieve balance. “You can’t stop the waves,” he said, “but you can learn how to surf.” After I heard that, I was finally able to release unattainable ideals of perfection and begin to truly live my life.

Yoga’s spiritual tools address the waves of life, from the smooth, happy times to those very not-okay times when we fall ill, when someone we love leaves or dies, when our lives turn inside out and our most vulnerable parts are exposed. Developing a Yoga Mind can help us find our own natural reserves of strength and resilience, and make them stronger. It does the same for the best parts of ourselves, showing us how to cultivate the habits and traits we aspire to embody. The spiritual practice of yoga helps us to shine brightly by helping us see the divine light already within us. With a yoga body, you can do impressive poses; with a Yoga Mind, you can do anything.



I learned this over twenty-five years of practicing yoga and working with individual clients, classes of students and groups

of teacher trainees, executives in corporate boardrooms, educators in seminars, and hospital staff, and by working with Francesco every week for over a year after his accident. The program in this book is an interpretation of the yoga tools used on my own spiritual path, Francesco's, and that of others (whom I've written as composite characters to respect their privacy).

I've been fortunate enough to learn from monks living in yoga ashrams, but I'm an average woman living in the everyday world. Therefore, my interpretations of these ancient concepts may be somewhat nontraditional. But I know that using these tools to develop a Yoga Mind works because they've gotten me through challenging situations and taught me how to live a happier life.

There are many tools in yoga, but I've chosen the ones that I've found most adaptable to our daily lives, and most helpful for achieving the goals of living authentically and fully; being more mindful; getting through the things that can fragment us with grace; finding a sense of purpose and meaning in our lives; and being happier.

These thirty yoga tools are organized into sections based on how they complement one another. The order they're in is modeled after the gentle, gradual process of an Integral Yoga class, starting with learning how to breathe your way to a more relaxed, receptive state of being in which you can do interior spiritual work. (Don't worry, it's much easier than it sounds!) Each day, a new yoga tool will be introduced. You'll learn how to apply it through a real-life experience, and then you'll find an

exercise so you can try the tool out. These exercises are simple and won't take much time, but their effects are palpable.

In Integral Yoga classes, there are brief periods of rest in a relaxed pose called Savasana. Between each group of yoga tools and their exercises, you will find a Savasana, a pause with a short overview of the upcoming tools and the kind of work that you will be doing:

Part 1: Grounding and Centering, where we begin with simple practices that give you the foundation of the Yoga Mind program.

Part 2: Mindful Shifts, where the seeds of positive change are subtle but noticeable.

Part 3: Finding Your Balance, where you maintain equilibrium while seeing and feeling the effects of the work you're doing.

Part 4: Steadiness and Easefulness, where you add to your established practice with tools to take it out into the world.

The point of yoga is to be and feel your best not just for an hour on the mat when you can get to class, but throughout your day, throughout your life. We just need a guide, some practical examples, and the occasional reminder. This book was designed to travel with you, to be there on your desk at work or in your bag. Think of it as your constant companion on your spiritual path.

After you work the program in order, you can use the yoga tools again in a variety of ways. Choose tools at random each day. Pick a tool and make it your focus for a week. When you have a particular need, meditate on a mantra; you'll find a number of these affirmations throughout the program. The yoga tools are also listed by category in the appendix, so if you need a certain type of tool, you'll have a quick reference guide.

For this kind of yoga, you don't need any fancy clothing, a mat, or big chunks of time. You don't need to be physically fit or particularly flexible, other than having an open mind. All you need are a simple notebook to keep track of feelings and changes along the way, and a desire to create positive shifts in your life. You don't have to wait for those shifts to maybe, hopefully happen someday. The yoga tools show you how to create them.

When I found yoga, the asana practice felt like a physical form of prayer. My only problem was how to take that prayer beyond the mat. I found the answer by using the yoga tools to help me develop a Yoga Mind. They taught me how to live life fully, see meaning and value in experiences of all kinds, and find sweet richness in simple moments. They gave me strength and resilience. They can do this for you, too.

The desire to help is something every being has within, to the point that it's more of an instinct than a choice. Initially I didn't know how I could help Francesco. But it is in absolute darkness that stars shine most brightly. It is from tremendous pressure that diamonds are formed. And so it was that in a very challenging time for him, and for me, the true gifts of yoga

were revealed. It is a great gift to be able to share them with you now.

Namaste, the traditional yoga greeting, means, “I see the divine light in you.” May this book help you see the divine light that burns so brightly within you.

d a y 1

sankalpa

(san-KAL-pa)

Setting an intention;
making a spiritual resolution.

Each January, I made the list: *Lose five pounds. No, make it ten. Well, start with five and see how you do. Go to the gym. Take up running (maybe when the weather gets warmer). Get the book on that new diet* [which, depending on the year and fad, would be low calorie, low fat, low carb, vegetarian, vegan, Paleo, etc.]. And by the first week of March, the list would be sticking out of the first quarter of the mostly unread diet book, right next to my unused sneakers. My intentions were good, but my New Year's resolutions never stuck.

Sankalpas, on the other hand, never failed.

Wheelchair be damned, with each visit to the hospital over the next two weeks, Francesco and I slipped right back into the routine we'd had at work: We gossiped. We talked about who

had gotten a new job, who had broken up with whom, and other news about former colleagues and celebrities. None of it was mean-spirited, and I knew my yoga teachers would have given me a pass on the not-very-spiritual activity of gossiping if they'd seen the relief on Francesco's grandmother's face when she heard him laughing. Nonni—a variation of the Italian word *nonna*, or "grandmother"—spoke only Italian and didn't understand what we were talking about, but her grandson's laughter—music that cut through the crisis—was universal.

On my long walks home from the hospital, though, I wept. The shocking near loss of a friend, and one so young, had abated and was replaced by a new sadness: helpless frustration. I'd become a yoga teacher so I could help people. I'd been especially drawn toward helping people who thought yoga wasn't accessible to them—seniors, or "elders," as they were respectfully called at Integral Yoga, as well as people with arthritis and other debilitating conditions and illnesses. I wanted to show them that anyone could do yoga.

Would that turn out to mean anyone *but* Fran, and all the other people in his ward who were waking up each day to the new reality of limbs that didn't move anymore and machines that breathed for them? That wasn't something I could accept. Some things had to be acknowledged; it was a fact that Francesco was gravely injured. He had an incomplete spinal cord injury, meaning that his spinal cord had not been completely severed. To the degree that his had, though, doctors felt it was unlikely he would use his hands, arms, or legs again. Things we take for granted, like getting up to go to the bathroom or pick-

ing up a cup of coffee for a sip, were now for Francesco in the same league as climbing Mount Everest.

But the idea that yoga couldn't help him was something I wouldn't even consider. I was a true believer in the power of yoga to help injuries of all types, physical, emotional, or spiritual—not cure, necessarily, but improve the lives of the people working with them. I'd personally seen amazing things during my years of practicing at Integral Yoga, a place that attracted not just the young and healthy but elders who took the elevator because their arthritic knees wouldn't let them climb the stairs. As part of my teacher training, I'd taken a Gentle Yoga class that included a ninety-year-old woman whose aide brought her into the room in a wheelchair. The aide eased her onto a setup of bolsters and blankets that the teacher had prepared on a yoga mat. There, this beautiful elder lifted her arm—the only part of her body she was able to move—gracefully in time with the rest of the students doing modified poses. The smile she wore throughout the class dissolved any doubt that might have remained in me and released it through tears of wonder. That woman, that beautiful elder who could barely move, was doing yoga.

And so, I resolved, could Fran. There was a way; there had to be. I just couldn't see it yet. I had faith that it would be revealed. In the meantime, I did what I could: I set a sankalpa.

Yoga's version of a resolution, a sankalpa is different from the promises we make to ourselves each January 1. It's less of a rigid, ironclad mandate and more of an intention. What makes a sankalpa more effective than a resolution is that it's usually directed toward someone other than ourselves.

At the start of many Integral Yoga classes, the teacher would instruct students to place the palms of their hands together at their hearts in what looked like a prayer. “Now, if you like, you can set a sankalpa, an intention,” the teacher would offer. “You can dedicate your practice today to someone in need. Or, if you need extra help with something, set your sankalpa toward that.” I was intrigued by this word that seemed equal parts promise, resolution, and intention, yet more powerful than any of them.

Further resonant understanding came via teachings from Swami Satchidananda, the founder of Integral Yoga. “Don’t have the word *impossible* in your vocabulary,” he told his students. “Stand up and make an affirmation.” He described a sankalpa as a strong decision and a pure thought based on the welfare of others. “Then,” he said, “your sankalpa will be firm.”

An estimated 40 percent of Americans make New Year’s resolutions, but research from the University of Scranton suggests that the percentage of people who achieve what they set out to do is a measly (though victorious) 8 percent. The reasons vary as to why. The goals may be too large, like total life makeovers, or too vague, like “getting in shape” versus something specific, like training to run or walk a 5K.

Swami Satchidananda’s words presented another possible explanation. My resolutions had always focused on me—losing weight, finding a boyfriend, getting a better-paying job, writing a book. There was nothing wrong with any of these goals, but because they were all about me, it was almost as easy to break them as to make them when the work of doing them got too

hard. I hadn't tried making a resolution for someone else's benefit before. And I couldn't imagine, say, giving up on Francesco.

After my long, thoughtful walk home from the hospital, I arrived at the building where I lived, in a Manhattan neighborhood near Gramercy Park but not as chichi, and close to the East Village but not as cool. When I got inside my front door, I reflexively took off my shoes, a habit learned at the ashram. I fed Ethel, my black and white kitty, and almost without thought I went straight to my yoga mat and sat down. I lit a candle on a little altar I'd made from a box covered with a pretty shawl. I sat and let my awareness rest on my breathing for a few minutes. I didn't know exactly how this was supposed to go—some yoga ceremonies could be pretty elaborate, with special garments and chants—but when I'd made a sankalpa in class, it had been as simple as making a wish on a birthday.

I'm going to help Francesco, I thought as I brought my hands together in Anjali Mudra, the prayer position. Then I added, *Help me to help him. Show me the way.*

The following week, the answer came.



yoga mind practice: Setting Your Sankalpa

In yoga, a sankalpa is a strong intention, usually in service of someone else. That doesn't mean you can't set a sankalpa for yourself, because more often than not, what benefits you will have a positive effect on others. You might set an intention to

quit smoking or start exercising three times a week for the benefit of someone you love and who loves you; your being healthier will make them happier. You could set a sankalpa to manage your work hours differently so you can spend more time with your children, for them as well as for you. Now you've probably figured out the true power behind the sankalpa, what makes it so effective and gives it fuel to last: love. We may give up easily on promises made to ourselves, but we're far more likely to keep a promise that will help someone or something we care about deeply.

When teaching yoga asanas, the physical postures, an instructor will make adjustments with the gentlest touch possible. Here, as well, an attitude of gentleness will bring about the most positive, least painful changes. For example, hard-core workout regimens are often quickly abandoned because they're just too brutal. But you're more likely to stick with a form of fitness you enjoy, even if it takes longer to show results, because you look forward to it.

With this gentle attitude in mind, close your eyes and let your awareness rest on your breathing for a few moments. Allow yourself to consider parts of your life where you'd like to cultivate positive change, and then the good these changes might bring to others. If you'd like to start a fitness program, think of the joy your family would feel about your being healthier and living longer. If you'd like to get a new job, think of the benefit your skills could bring to a company that needs them. When your intentions are for the good of others, you can easily see how what is helpful to you would be helpful to them. It's a win-win.

Now imagine those benefits rippling outward. One of my students, K, began her goal of losing weight and getting fit so she could set a good example for her daughter. They began working out together, and soon K's husband wanted to join in, too. The whole family got fit and healthier, all because of K's intention to give her daughter a positive influence. Your actions have a ripple effect—sometimes seen, sometimes not, yet all important.

Now compose your sankalpa, using positive, encouraging language, and set it by writing it down on the first page of your Yoga Mind journal. If you wish, you can turn this practice into a puja, or spiritual ceremony, by lighting a candle, placing flowers on the table where you write, and adding a photo of the person for whom you're creating this sankalpa.

Your written sankalpa can be as short as a single sentence or as long as a paragraph. You don't need to go into great detail. The divine light within your heart knows the truth of your intention.

about the author

Suzan Colón is a former senior editor of *O, The Oprah Magazine* and an Integral Yoga Institute yoga teacher and teacher trainer. Suzan's writing has appeared in four *Oprah Magazine* "best of" anthologies, *Details*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *The Huffington Post*, and many other media outlets. Suzan has been a yoga practitioner for twenty-five years and has been trained in basic and intermediate levels of yoga, Therapeutic Yoga, and Yoga for Arthritis. She is the creator of the iTunes app Take a Yoga Break, which was named one of *Fast Company*'s Innovation Agents of 2014. Suzan lives in the New York area with her husband, Nathan. Visit her at SuzanColon.com.

Praise for *Yoga Mind*

“Suzan Colón’s *Yoga Mind* is a much-needed collection of mental and physical exercises anyone can do—and I mean anyone, with any body, any limitations of time, health, or mobility. It’s an inspiring introduction for beginners and a terrific enhancement for longtime practitioners. These thirty lessons left me feeling grounded, renewed, and grateful for Colón’s warm, practical, and refreshingly skeptical guidance. I felt like I’d been on a short daily yoga retreat with a good friend. I’ll be giving this book to friends and family for a long time.”

—Suzanne Morrison, author of *Yoga Bitch*

"Most books on yoga explain how to achieve peace through teaching about body postures. Although *Yoga Mind* includes physical techniques, this book does much more. Through her engaging, accessible style, Suzan Colón explains the principles and attitudes that lead to true inner transformation by sharing practices that anyone can do—no matter what age you are or what shape your body is in. **I highly recommend this book.**"

—James Baraz, author of *Awakening Joy* and co-founder of Spirit Rock Meditation Center, Woodacre, CA

"What a refreshing and empowering book. Colón gives readers permission to make peace with ourselves and our bodies through this practice. Thank you for this inspiring read."

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“*Yoga Mind* takes us on a deep and delightful journey on how yoga can benefit our day-to-day lives. There is practical wisdom on each page, delivered with such wit that I found myself laughing out loud. The format of the book is ingenious: a personal story of dealing with tragedy, mixed with specific lesson plans for spiritual growth, and **one of the most concise and clear summaries of the yogic path that you will find anywhere.**”

—Swami Asokananda, President, Integral Yoga Institute of New York City

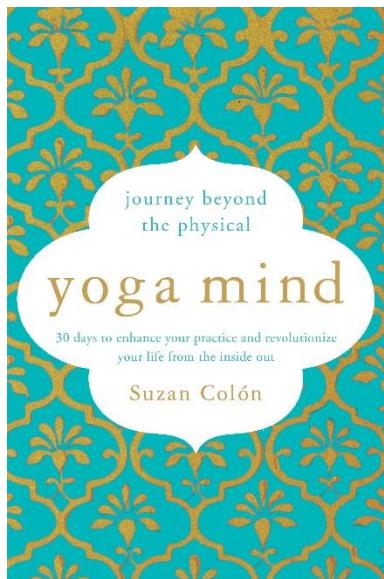
“In *Yoga Mind*, longtime yoga teacher Suzan Colón gives us a set of daily ‘spiritual tools’ designed to change our lives. **Whether you have a yoga practice or are just starting one, her plan elevates the power of physical movement to the next plane.** In down-to-earth, empathetic prose, Colón asks us to ponder how to express positive human values such as kindness, compassion, honesty, and mindful communication and illuminates them with stories from her own life. It might seem that these qualities are in short supply today, but Colón teaches us that they’re waiting inside all of us, ready to be coaxed out. Step by step, and with great generosity, she shows us how.”

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—Jivana Heyman, founder, Accessible Yoga

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