



## MY JOURNEY TO INTEGRAL YOGA

Priti K Shroff  
 Founder & Managing Director  
 PRISIM – The Healing Temple



By Ritu Zaveri  
 Yoga Teacher & Writer

To speak of an individual's life or journey, of health and prosperity and their collective attainment is much like attempting to pin down infinity and explain it through words. Personally, I believe what we call 'good health' is an individual's journey to develop a friendship & understanding with themselves. Of course one's self isn't just the flesh and blood that we call our body. A being is the meeting point of the physical, mental, intellectual, emotional, and the spiritual being. Cultivating a sense of harmony between these various layers of the being is why we're all existent on this planet. Developing that warrior-like yet gentle and tender attitude that makes you meet every pitfall with the same equanimity as every marvellous victory, is what the journey of life is all about. The irony of it all is that the victories and the pitfalls complement each other with a subtle harmony. But do we always manage to envision this? Of course not. We may be born out of perfection but we're full of flaws. And if you look deep enough, each imperfection is beautiful. We just need to learn the art of appreciating it just as we train ourselves to learn everything else.

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When you enter a yoga class, and juggle between each asana feeling your body stretching back and forth and each muscle and nerve squeezing all the strain out, that is precisely what you are training your mind to do. You're telling your mind, "Go on now, just a little bit more. This is essential. This is required." Why? For growth, for pushing your boundaries, for overcoming your own shortcomings and bringing out the very best you have to offer as an individual. And the marvel of it all is that there is always room for so much more. There is never a moment when you can sit back and proclaim you've aced the art because there is always room for growth. And if you humbly accept this fact then you'll see that class comprises neither a teacher nor a student. It's just an energy exchange

between two points of infinity that have been brought together by the coagulation of a series of events. That is exactly why life is so priceless and so invaluable. To add to the glory we have two very beautiful gifts granted to us and placed in our hearts so that we never falter- Faith & Love. They ensure we carry ourselves through every minute of life without ever getting lost. If we allow that fount of love to overflow and that faith to rise to our greatest inner heights, there is nothing we can't achieve. But how do we tap into it and never feel a lack? For me the answer has always been Yoga. Even in moments when I wasn't aware, and there have been many of those too, yoga has been my best friend, my angel, the sunshine in my life.



I think death is actually one of the greatest hammers with which The Universe sculpts us into the marvellous pieces of art we're meant to be. I was about 12 years when my mother committed suicide and left behind utter chaos that continued for years to come. No one in my family could find a way to deal with the situations that prevailed thereafter as one disaster followed another and shook the very grounds of all our existence. One death led to another, one misgiving led to another and before we knew it, utter chaos ensued. From finances to everything else took a big setback. It got to me. I had dreams of my own, travelling abroad, becoming successful and rich and I gradually watched them all wither away right before my eyes. Little did I know back then that it was only because life had so much more in store for me.



I used to learn yoga in school as a subject. Although I was very resistant initially, a gradual transformation began taking over me. I began practising yoga, pranayama and different forms of meditation. I developed a keen liking toward Classical music and began practising for a few hours each day. I moved out of Mumbai to Pondicherry and Tiruvannamalai in search of peace. I started working with the earth and growing vegetables and flowers without the use of pesticides or any chemicals. I began teaching Yoga as a subject. I met people from all walks of life, from across the globe. Their company made me acutely aware of the fact that there are so many different perspectives to the same situation, each depending upon our upbringing and families. Over the years, I managed to begin projects that worked towards the welfare of animals and healing them from their suffering. I worked with the homeless and poor attempting to support them to the best of my abilities. I began carrying food to the beggars and sadhus living around town with the help of some friends. We made an arrangement with the fruit seller who gave us gunny bags full of bananas that could be fed to all the monkeys and langurs around the forest. I began writing articles for people who shared similar interests. I met Masters who worked with people through their difficulties with much empathy in their hearts. It was an eye opener to say the very least. From a spoilt, unyielding young girl, I transformed into a mature, sensible and compassionate individual willing to take on all the struggles of life with a new found vigour. Having returned to Mumbai, I began working in the corporate world. One door opened another until I finally began teaching Corporate & private Yoga classes to those who asked for help. I began working with positive affirmations and studying their significance on the human mind and body. The outcome was phenomenal.



For anyone who has practised yoga for the shortest duration will know that it isn't just an ordinary exercise. Somewhere, in some form, you will have experienced a transformation of some sort take over even though it may not seem too evident. Some notice evident weight loss, some start feeling lighter and happier, some feel clearer and calmer, some experience better sleep quality while some notice visible changes in their immediate circumstances. It's because yoga doesn't end with the class that you attend. It encompasses your life even if you aren't aware of it. It embraces your being, and very gently, carries you towards a deeper place within yourself. Different religions have different names for this deeper place. The name is insignificant. The fact that it exists is what matters. It's a pointer to us that we're so much greater than the structured world we live in. And each time we turn to it, we're allowing ourselves to heal just a little bit more. We're allowing growth to happen. Such an exhilarating experience! Our thoughts are not a burden placed on our heads meant to make us feel as though our lives are crumbling down all the time. Our thoughts are our best friends even if they're not all positive and amazing. They are the instruments with which we experience and express life. Each thought, no matter how insignificant, is a vibration. One that is capable of building life, sustaining and inspiring it and destroying it as well. If we choose to utilise these gifts of life to heal, to harmonise, to appreciate each one's uniqueness, we would tap into a marvellous, efficient and united world. Each one of us is gifted with the power to enhance life because we're alive. Yoga is surely one of the many instruments that can help us integrate this understanding and channelize it in the right way.

So for all those reading this, you're deeply fortunate life has offered the opportunity to you to sit back and ask the right questions. And I hope that you are fortunate enough to find at least some of the answers just as I did. Because no amount of struggle is worth one minute of it unless you've found a way to love your life for all that it is, embracing the good and the bad with the same fortitude.

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