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ATHA

Readiness and Commitment

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Until one is committed, there is a hesitancy, the chance to draw back. The moment one definitely commits oneself then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would otherwise never have occurred.

Whatever you can do, or dream you can, *begin it*.

Boldness has genius, power and magic in it.

JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE

BEGINNINGS, LIKE ENDINGS, CAN BE difficult or exciting. Starting something new implies change, a step toward an eventual goal. *Atha* is the very first word in the Yoga Sūtras and is considered an auspicious way to begin. Whenever we make an important decision, often the universe will energetically support us.

Atha here means beginning the study of who we are, where we are, and how we can make incremental changes to our inner and outer self in order to be less involved with material objects and more in tune with how we feel and how our actions affect those around us.

Learning, practicing, and integrating the various aspects of yoga happens over a long period of time and requires patience and perseverance. Beware: your initial eagerness and energy may not last. Allow the information to seep into your core gradually and intentionally. There is no rush. Many of us want instant gratification—to learn something and then quickly move on to something else. Yet real, lasting inner change takes time.

Our eagerness to learn and the frequency of our practice will affect the velocity of learning. A person can be extremely excited to learn yoga, yet not have the discipline to follow through with the practices. If we are enrolled in a class because it is required for our degree or certificate, we may fall into boredom or become lackadaisical. Practicing often but in an inattentive way will also hamper progress. Ideally, we genuinely want to learn, are able to carve out time in our schedule to learn, and can maintain a regular and consistent practice for long enough to allow the knowledge we seek to sink in.

A heart-mind that is fresh and open will absorb information like a sponge. Repetition reinforces the knowledge learned by creating a pattern in the heart-mind. Young children are a perfect example of open heart-minds learning through repetition. Not only do they have less in their hearts and minds to interfere with perception, but they will also repeat something over and over to themselves until it sticks (leaves a lasting impression) in their memory. Growing up, we accumulate obstacles to learning in the form of physical limitations, emotional scars, and intellectual or spiritual rigidity. Cultivating a beginner's mind during our studies will allow us to truly grasp the profound depths of yoga.

The Internet avails us to almost unlimited amounts of information. With so many different directions to choose from, how can we focus on those that improve our lives? Sitting in a restful state of quietness allows us to observe the crazy movements of the world. Regrouping, then setting an intention and deciding

to follow one particular direction, will open up opportunities that otherwise would not have been available. Similarly, prayer lets the universe know how to help us.

Sometimes we bite off more than we can chew by taking on too many projects. This can create more stress for us and siphons our attention from our friends and family. It is important to sit quietly and contemplate whether we have the time and resources to commit to another endeavor. For example, a decision to have children requires that you let go of certain activities in order to give your children the attention they need to grow up healthy and happy. All of a sudden, your priorities have shifted, and a new kind of lifestyle has begun.

Commitment holds a solid, grounding energy that provides stability and structure to our lives. Deciding to learn and experience what yoga really is requires diligence and effort, which will undoubtedly yield fruit over time. Yoga is a lifestyle designed to develop and refine our body, mind, and heart, our thoughts, words, and actions. As Steve Jobs once said, "The journey is the reward."



THOUGHTS

Learning anything well requires eagerness, commitment, and perseverance.

With an open mind, I can direct my attention inward and see what unfolds.

- ✓ I will set aside time for learning and practicing the principles of yoga.

EXERCISES

Think of a time when you took on too many projects at the same time. Writing down your thoughts, ask yourself:

Which projects could have waited?

How did this overextended state affect the quality of your personal life?

What could you have done differently?

Think of other areas of study you began, but could not keep up. Write down the reason(s) why you think they ended. Did something more appealing replace them? Did you give them enough of a chance?

What commitments have you made in your life that have brought you fulfillment?