

# Philosophy on the mat



An Essential Guide for Yoga Teachers

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# 1

## TEACHING YOGA PHILOSOPHY

In the sacred dance between breath and body, yoga reveals profound wisdom that beckons you to dive deeper. The true value of yoga unfolds when you use this knowledge to enrich your practice and your teaching, leading to an enhanced understanding for both yourself and your students. As a dedicated yoga teacher, you understand this yet you might find incorporating yoga philosophy into your classes somewhat challenging. ‘Philosophy on the Mat’ aims to assist you in incorporating this ancient wisdom into your classes in a practical, accessible, and beneficial way.

Historically, yoga was a spiritual and meditative discipline, designed to guide practitioners on a journey toward enlightenment. The practice involved contemplative techniques aimed at fostering a deep connection between the mind, body, and spirit. The goal was to achieve a heightened state of self-awareness, inner peace, and a transcendent understanding of the self and the universe. Its purpose was to provide a pathway for practitioners to explore the depths of consciousness and attain a state of spiritual awakening.

The modern application of yoga extends its benefits beyond the spiritual realm, encompassing the physical and mental aspects of well-being, making it a comprehensive practice for enhancing overall health. Physically, yoga involves a range of postures, stretches, and movements that contribute to flexibility, strength, and balance. Mentally, the practice reduces stress and encourages mindfulness and clarity through focused breathing and meditation. Spiritually, even in a secular context, yoga can provide practitioners with a sense of connection, purpose, and an inner harmony.

Yoga philosophy equips practitioners with a wide range of tools and perspectives that adeptly navigate the intricacies of the modern world. Grounded in ancient knowledge, it enables the contemporary student with resources to effectively manage the challenges of a fast-paced lifestyle. Amidst the complexities of the current era, integration of these teachings can help practitioners nurture resilience, inner peace, and a sense of purpose.

Through this book, yoga teachers are invited to explore diverse philosophical viewpoints, cultivating a solid understanding of different perspectives. The explored foundational works include:

- The Vedas offer insights into the spiritual and ritualistic aspects of yoga. Highlighting enduring concepts such as the interconnectedness of all life and the importance of ethical conduct. Today, practitioners can draw inspiration from the Vedas to harmonise their inner selves and outside world.
- The Upanishads explore the nature of reality, the self, and the pursuit of the ultimate truth. These philosophical scriptures guide practitioners on the path of self-realisation and the quest for meaning. In today's chaotic world, these teachings resonate with students seeking inner peace and purpose in their lives.

## Teaching Yoga Philosophy

- The Bhagavad Gita offers practical guidance on ethics, duty, and the path to spiritual realisation. It enables its followers to align with their natural inclinations by presenting them diverse approaches to practice yoga. Its teachings on integrating life's demands with spiritual growth provide valuable insights for practitioners seeking balance in both personal and professional spheres.
- The Yoga Sutras present a classical text that articulates a systematic approach to yoga, incorporating ethical guidelines and meditation. The text provides tools for effective stress management, enhanced mental clarity, attainment of serenity and inner peace. The Yoga Sutras offer a timeless resource offering guidance for navigating the challenges of contemporary life.
- The Tantras highlight the integration of the physical and spiritual realms. Tantra teachings serve as a reminder of the inherent potential for spiritual growth within our daily lives. These sacred texts offer a valuable perspective on bridging the gap between the mundane and the sacred, fostering a holistic approach to spiritual development.
- The Puranas offer a treasure trove of mythology, containing stories that captivate while imparting moral and spiritual lessons. Despite their antiquity, the Puranas offer insightful narratives that resonate with modern students. This connection enhances the learning process, creating an engaging and enlightening bridge between ancient wisdom and contemporary understanding.
- The Hatha Yoga Pradipika marks a significant shift from earlier texts by placing a primary focus on the physical body's transformation. This departure from tradition persists to this day, and its teachings continue to be relevant in our modern world. The writings equips students with essential tools to cultivate strength, flexibility, and inner peace in their daily lives.

## Philosophy on the mat: An Essential Guide for Yoga Teachers

This compilation, though not an exhaustive exploration of the extensive yoga canon, serves as a foundational resource for gaining a solid understanding of key viewpoints in yoga philosophy. Its significance for yoga teachers is apparent through the inclusion of practices that can be taught and integrated into yoga offerings. ‘Philosophy on the Mat’ offers valuable insights and practical applications for educators seeking to enhance both their knowledge and teaching methodologies.

In this book, each chapter delves into a seminal text, offering a clear understanding of the ideas presented and how you can effectively teach them ‘on the mat.’ This caters to teachers keen to expand and deepen their own practice and teaching, providing inspiration to explore the broader context of yoga.

It will guide you to explore diverse traditions and experiment with different tools, cultivating a dynamic and enriched approach to your teaching. The spectrum of ideas offers a rich array of perspectives to explore. Rather than seeking a singular truth, consider staying open to the possibility of embracing multiple truths. Understanding these philosophies will enable your students to have a deeper understanding of yoga and its benefits.

‘Philosophy on the Mat’ is not intended to serve as a scholarly work; within that domain, numerous qualified academics excel. My purpose is not to engage in arguments or commentary regarding various ideas expressed in different philosophies. Instead, I consider them all as sincere observations brought to us by wise sages who dedicated their lifetimes to contemplate profound questions of human existence. Rather than engaging in philosophical debates, this book offers pragmatic and valuable methods to integrate ancient wisdom into your teaching.

Within yoga philosophy, we unveil answers to enduring questions that humans have pondered for centuries: ‘Who am I?’ ‘What is my purpose?’ ‘What happens when I die?’ The responses to these questions often revolve around themes of faith, devotion, and, most importantly, consistent practice. As yoga gains popularity in mainstream culture, many students

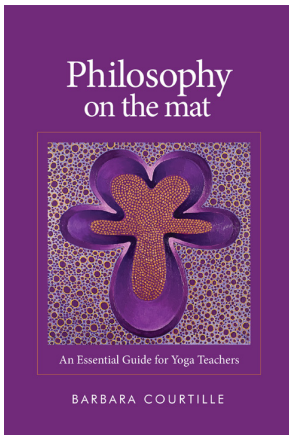
## Teaching Yoga Philosophy

are eager to delve into the deeper insights embedded in the scriptures. While some students may not initially seek spiritual awakening, many find themselves on the transformative journey over the time through consistent practice. Dedicated students often seek more than postural practice and have a genuine interest in yoga philosophy.

In any case, the effectiveness of the teachings hinges on presenting these concepts in a manner that is both accessible and pertinent to the modern student. 'Philosophy on the Mat' serves as a reference guide to support you in that endeavour. It will keep you motivated to deepen your own knowledge and practice, ultimately enhancing your ability to inspire and guide others on their yoga journey.

As you venture into the pages that follow, explore practical insights and teachings that enhance your understanding and application of yoga philosophy. I encourage you to incorporate philosophy into your yoga offerings to better serve your students, using the wisdom texts provided in this book. Let these chapters be a source of inspiration and guidance as you deepen your connection to the wisdom of yoga. Embrace the journey ahead and allow your exploration of these texts to enrich your teaching and personal practice.

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