



Transforming Woe to Wow

# mindsutra

with Yoga, Psychology and Genetics





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I dedicate this book to...

To Maharshi Patanjali who guided us at every step of writing this book

To Amit and Ansh, my angels, for making it all worthwhile and inspiring me  
to explore life

To my parents Manju and Ashok and parents-in-law Indu and Girdhar  
for your loving support and enthusiasm. You orchestrate the beautiful  
symphony of my world.

- Shaifali

This book is dedicated to all the shades of love I live

The delightful love of my kids, Vihaan & Asmi

The anchoring love of my brother Manu and my parents Krishna and Mithila

My devoted love for Shyam

And above all, the self-love which comes from selflessness of many friends,  
teachers and caregivers.

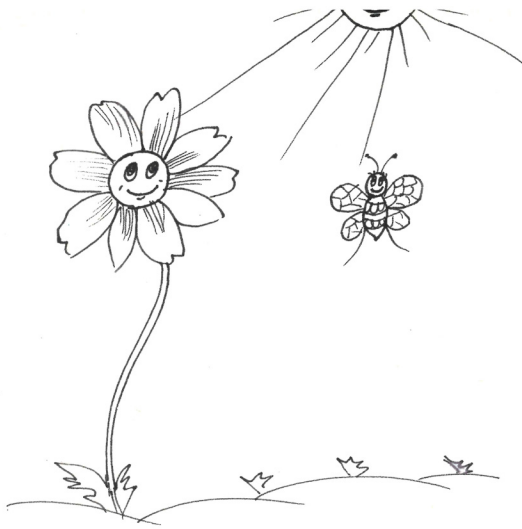
-Meghna



## Reader's note



Patient confidentiality is a strong and time-honored principle of psychiatric ethics. The patients/ friends mentioned in this book have authorized us to write their true histories. Some names may have been altered to protect their privacy. Their stories are true and unchanged.



'A single ray of light is all that is required to dispel deep darkness,'  
said the Bumblee Bee to the Friendly Flower.





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# The Ocean and the Wave



I wonder if the waves know where they are born or where they are going.

I wonder if they know that they are water and they will return to the water.

I wonder whether they compete amongst themselves as to which is bigger or bubblier or stronger.

I wonder if they know what matters is only what matters to them...

I wonder if they realize that there is never any competition. They come from the ocean and they will return to it.

Eventually, nothing matters as long as they realize that they are not the waves in the ocean but the ocean as waves. Nobody can take away their beauty... their essence from them...

They were whatever they identified themselves to be:

Whether they choose to be the waves which are born to die and have no choice of their own...

Or they choose to be the glorified beauties which dance and shine in their full bloom and then after having spent their time, slow their pace down and merge into each other to become the ocean eventually.





## Why we wrote this book: Meghna Varma



I was working as an eye surgeon when I was diagnosed with an eye disease-Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP). The diagnosis of RP is a polite way of telling someone, ‘The cells in your retina are dying. And since no one knows why these cells are on a suicide mission, there is no treatment for it.’ Well, I felt like being ‘*run out*’ in the best match of my life. Hurt, disappointed and anxious. The disease left me with so many unanswered questions. ‘What would my colleagues say if they found out? Will they pity, ignore, or ostracise me? What will my patients think about being treated by an eye doctor who has impaired vision herself? What would my in-laws say? Should I have children? What if I go blind soon?’ The diagnosis left me feeling imperfect in every aspect of my life. Over the next ten years, I turned from a bright confident medico to someone grappling with anxiety and self doubt.

And then, I met people who were leading complete lives in spite of a disability or disease or adverse life events. These awesome men and women were not victims of their situations but victors of their life challenges. It was then, I took a decision. A decision to take this imperfect woman that I thought myself to be and make her imperfectly perfect. Not for the world. But for myself. And thus began my pursuit of wholeness. Not just health and wellness but wholeness.

It was at this time, I decided to switch careers from ophthalmology to psychiatry. As I started interacting with more and more people in my clinical practice, I realised that *happiness is a choice*. A choice to deal with our life challenges with strength and flexibility. Some people have a natural tendency to deal with adversities without stress. But, the good news is that it can be learnt too, through practices like Yog and Psychology. *We can learn to face our challenges and thrive even in adversity.*

I too found the strength to address the challenges in my professional and personal life through both yoga and psychology. In fact, I was amazed at the similarities between the ancient and the modern philosophies. I saw that an integrated approach from Yoga and psychology helped my patients deal with their life issues better.

It was during this time, I connected with Shaifali, my senior from high school and medical school. Shaifali, a pathologist herself, firmly believes that health is not merely the absence of disease, but the absence of dis - ease ( not being at ease with oneself), and a more holistic approach is required for health. Since Shaifali is a pathologist, she understands health at a cellular level. It was she who introduced me to the Nobel Prize winning work on 'Telomeres' (the protective ends of our chromosomes) and the direct correlation of telomere length with health and healing. She made me understand that a stress free life could help arrest the progression of my disease and probably heal me at a deeper level.

It was an *Aha!* moment for us to see the dots connect between Yoga, psychology, and genetics. We thought of writing a book on mind management tools from Yog and Psychology. As they have a direct effect on our health, happiness, and longevity, down to the cellular level.

This book is an attempt to bring to you, the reader, some real-life stories, a lot of research and expert opinions on mind management tools. We call these tools *Mindsutras as they are a combination of modern Psychology and ancient Yog Sutras. Wherever possible, we have presented research on the effect of these Mindsutras on our health (at the cellular level).* Dear reader, we hope that some of it will inspire you to find your own answers. This book is neither about showcasing our knowledge (which has been around for centuries), nor are we experts in this field. It is an attempt to inspire you to start your journey towards wholeness.

Each one of us has a light within that guides us during our darkest hour. A single ray of light can dispel darkness, a single spark of insight can transform our lives. We hope that some of the insights or practical exercises in this book are able to help you move towards a brighter future. The essence of this book is in this prayer-

*Asato Ma Sat Gamaya*

*Tamaso Ma Jyotir Gamaya*

*Mrityor Ma Amritam Gamaya*

*Om Shanti, Shanti, Shanti*

*Lead us from ignorance to knowledge*

*Lead us from darkness to light*

*Peace, peace, peace*

Wishing you love and light,

Meghna







## How this book happened: Shaifali Gupta



I was 22, and barely out of college, when I was introduced to a young boy as a part of an arranged marriage proposal. As we chatted about different things, the boy asked me, ‘What do you want to do in life?’ Back then, I had just finished my med school, and I was trying to decide on the specialisation I would pursue for the rest of my life. He probably wanted to hear something regarding that. Absolutely out of nowhere or maybe from somewhere deep within, I said, ‘I want to study and share the teachings of Yog!’

It had surprised me even then. I did not know much about Yoga at that moment. But today, quarter of a century later, I know that it’s been my calling since forever. After I got married and moved to a new city, my family and work became my world. I longed to study Ashtanga Yog more deeply, especially its first two limbs called the Yamas and the Niyamas.

During the pandemic, I chanced upon an old memory of mine. Buried deep in my closet, with most of its pages ruined, was an old diary of mine. Turning through the pages, I was reminded of the girl I was then. I came across this page on which I had written about my dream to learn and share the lessons of Yog. When I discovered this page, I had goose bumps.

A photograph of a handwritten note on lined paper, showing the text from the previous block. The handwriting is in cursive and somewhat slanted. There are some ink blots and a small tear in the paper at the bottom.

So when I say I wish to be a  
yoga teacher - I mean I  
shall in this lifetime have  
reached all my definitions, so  
as to remove all subconscious  
influences of else on my mind,  
well enough to teach them.

It was like rediscovering my life purpose. The words I had written so many years ago awakened a strong desire in me to connect back to Yogic philosophy. I was now meditating regularly and started researching Yogsutras exhaustively. I started mulling over the idea of writing a book on *Yama* and *Niyama*. I had approached a few friends to work with me on this subject but nothing seemed to materialise.

One day out of nowhere, my brother, Harshit, spoke about his classmate from middle school, Meghna. He thought Meghna might be interested in this topic and connected both of us. We just clicked instantly. During our first conversation, both of us knew that we would end up working on a book on Yog together. We were surprised to discover how our interests and thoughts converged. I wanted to probe the mind-body connection deeper with Yog since I am a firm believer that our body not only hears our thoughts but manifests them. Since Meghna came from a psychology background and I am a pathologist, we wanted to write a book connecting Yog with psychology and genetics. Meghna instantly connected these ethical principles of Yog with the Positive psychology principles that she was working with.

While we were working on this book, my husband, Amit, was reading the book, 'The Telomere effect' by Nobel Prize winner Elizabeth Blackburn and health psychologist Elissa Epel. I felt compelled to read it after his great reviews. As I read it, I was stunned at how much the Yogic science and the 'Telomere effect' research findings had in common. The practises mentioned in the book to increase longevity and health at the cellular level were in sync with practises mentioned by Maharishi Patanjali in his epic compilation on Yog- 'The Yog Sutras'. They intertwined with each other; each complementing the other so completely. I wondered whether reading this book, 'The Telomere Effect' was a sign from the Universe helping me connect the dots to create this book. In my further discussions with Meghna, we decided to write a book to bring out this commonality between Yog, psychology and telomere research.

*This book is our attempt to put forward the Yogic philosophy and its practical applications to modern life.*

The 5 Yamas and 5 Niyamas are like 10 mind management tools laid down by Patanjali in Yogsutras, that will be described in this book. These are like the alphabets of the language of life. *We have added recent research from psychology and genetics for the reader to correlate. We call these yogic mind management tools 'Mindsutra'. It is intriguing that these 'Yog sutras' written approximately 2200 years ago are as relevant today and correlate with health psychology.*

As we started discovering the Mindsutras while writing this book, our lives became happier and richer. Now we can sense an amazing balance in our personal and professional lives. We are sure these Mindsutra will help you, the reader, create magic in your lives.

With love,

Shaifali







### **Yoga sutra 1.1**

अथ योगानुशासनम् ॥ १ ॥

योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः ॥ २ ॥

Here begins the discipline of Yog. Through Yog, the distortions of the mind are managed.

## The invisible rope

Once upon a time, there was a merchant who had a beautiful black horse. The merchant would ride to the town market on his horse every day to sell his wares. He would tie the horse to a tree with a rope at some distance away from the market and would untie it in the evening. One day, the merchant forgot to bring the rope with him. Not one to be befuddled, he just pretended to do the motions of tying the horse with the rope. Though not tied to the tree, the horse waited for his master to untie him in the evening, grazing well within the perimeter of the invisible rope. In the evening the merchant did the motions of untying the invisible rope. Lo and behold!! the horse now started trotting along on its way home!

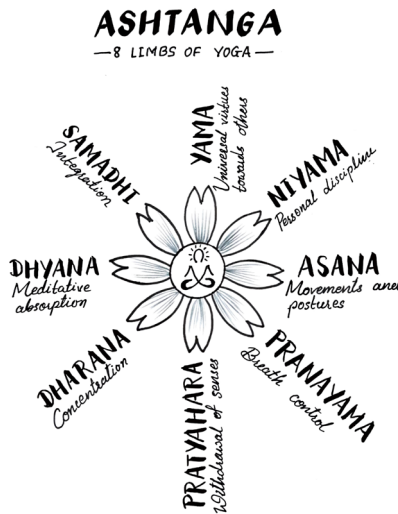
Like the horse, we all have invisible bonds of thoughts, images, beliefs and interpretations. They tie us down to a limited perimeter of life. This book Mindsutra is about untying the invisible bonds of our mind, with techniques from Yog and Psychology.

# Chapter 1: Introducing Mindsutra



We would love you to think of the Mindsutra as your best friends. Besties make our life not only joyous, they make it meaningful. The way you turn to your bestie for a sound advice when in dilemma, you can turn to the Mindsutra for guidance. Let us tell you all about the Mindsutra.

The Mindsutra have origins in the ‘Yog sutra’, the foundational text of Yogic philosophy, compiled by Maharshi Patanjali over 2200 years ago.



*(Ashtanga= eight anga= limbs of yoga described by Maharishi Patanjali in the Yogsutras).*

We usually know of Yog as body work (asanas) and breath work (pranayama). But these are just two of the eight limbs of Ashtanga Yoga

described by Patanjali. The other six limbs predominantly deal with mind work. The Yogsutra postulate that if the mind can be managed, everything else including health, happiness, and success will follow.

*Yogsutras lay the foundation for mind work in the first two limbs called the Yamas and Niyamas.* The first limb of Yog the *Yamas*, literal meaning ‘restraints’; you could think of the five *Yamas* as five friends who guide us improve our relationship with the external world. There are five yamas - Non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, creative intelligence and non-possessiveness. The second limb is referred to as the *Niyamas*, or ‘observances’ . The 5 *Niyamas* are those friends who help improve our relationship with ourselves. They include purity, contentment, self-discipline, self-study and surrender. These ten friends are your therapist when you are down or your self-development coach when you are on the go.

*What is amazing is that there are correlates for all the five Yamas and five Niyamas in modern psychology. We coined the term Mindsutras for the psychological correlates of yoga. These Mindsutras are simple. They are practical. They are well researched. And the best part is, they can be used by anyone, anywhere.*

Whether you are a 16 year old facing adjustment issues at high school or a 65 year old facing loneliness, one of these 10 Mindsutra will hold your hand, comfort you, and guide you to solve your problems. They will give you some practical tips backed by the latest research.

If it seems too good to be true, here are three reasons why you should invest your time to know, understand and apply them in your day-to-day life:

1. Yog has stood the test of time. These principles have survived for about 2200 years and that itself can be proof for their effectiveness.

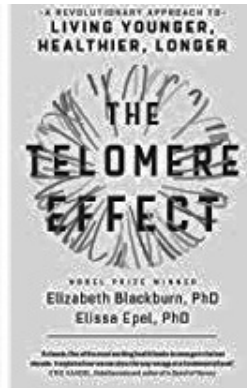


2. Nobel laureate Elizabeth Blackburn's work done on telomeres (protective ends of chromosomes) proves the direct effect of these principles on our cellular health. A book co-authored by her called 'The Telomere Effect: A revolutionary approach to living younger, healthier, longer' correlates mind management with cellular health.
  
3. Research from modern psychology also testifies that following these Mindsutras results in a happier and healthier life.

### **THE TELOMERE CONNECT**

Elizabeth Blackburn, an Australian-American scientist won the Nobel prize for her work on telomeres in 2009. Telomere is a structure at the end of chromosomes that protects the chromosome. In 1984, Blackburn co-discovered telomerase, the enzyme that replenishes the telomeres. For this work, she was awarded the 2009 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine. Telomeres are the gene sequences at the end of our chromosomes that act like protective caps on our DNA. They are like the protective plastic tip at the end of our shoelaces that prevent our shoelaces from fragmenting and thus getting damaged. Each time a cell divides, the telomeres become shorter. Eventually, the telomeres become so short that the cell can no longer divide. It eventually ages and dies. Equally amazing was the work that followed the discovery of telomerase. Researchers worldwide started conducting experiments to study the activities which cause increase or decrease the amount of telomerase in human cells. It has been proved that perception of stress (and not stress itself) can lead to decrease in telomerase and hence shorter telomeres. Also, practices like gratitude, meditation, exercise replenish the telomerase leading to better cellular health and longevity. These experiments have been captured and explained beautifully in the book

‘The Telomere effect’ written by health psychologist Eliza Epel along with Elizabeth Blackburn. Throughout this book, we will be referring to the experiments mentioned in this book in order to demonstrate the correlation between yoga, psychology and its effect on telomere length. These portions have been put in a grey box and have been referenced to the book ‘The telomere effect’. It is an attempt by us to emphasise that the practice of Mindsutra (rooted in Yogic philosophy) can directly affect our health and longevity.



This book is an attempt to introduce you to these 10 Mindsutras. Each of the 10 Mindsutra mentioned here have a specific quality that will make your relationship with life constructive and beautiful. Contrary to the popular belief valuing these Mindsutra does not limit us from living life, rather they open up our lives to more beautiful possibilities.

We would love you to think of these Mindsutras as the 10 best friends you would cherish for life.

Let us introduce you to them!

## **1. Ahimsa or Non-violence**

*Ahimsa* is the friend who calms us and gives us direction when we are angry.

*Ahimsa*, the first *Yama*, invites us to stop any blame games, and take responsibility for our own happiness. Psychology too emphasises responsibility as the first step to positivity. *Ahimsa* will help you solve our conflicts better by being more flexible and empathetic.

## **2. Satya or Truth**

*Satya* is that hoest friend of ours who knows us in and out and helps us grow in our life purpose. We can turn to *Satya* when making important life decisions. It helps us be more truthful to ourselves and others without hurting them.

*Satya*, the second *Yama*, is about following our inner truth or life purpose. Interestingly, modern psychologists and world leaders today agree with this: We perform our best when we have a purpose. *Satya* and *Ahimsa* are like two friends who make our lives fulfilling and happy. Truth makes nonviolence very powerful, while non-violence prevents our truthfulness from being hurtful.

## **3. Asteya or Non-stealing**

*Asteya* is the friend who prevents us from stealing our time and joy from ourselves. When we don't find joy even in binge watching or partying with friends or even when we have achieved worldly success, we can turn to *Asteya* for some sound advice. *Asteya* helps bring back the joy into our lives.

*Asteya*, the third *Yama*, invites us to be centred within ourselves. It is also a very apt psychological hack in the modern world of social media.

#### 4. ***Brahmacharya* or moving in with Divine intelligence**

*Brahmacharya* is the friend who helps focus our energies so that we find creative solutions in life.

*Brahmacharya*, the fourth *Yama*, invites us to experience Divine connectivity through creativity. Many artists and scientists believe that genius happens through them and not from them.

#### 5. ***Aparigraha* or Non-possessiveness**

*Aparigraha* is our simple minded friend. Whenever we travel with this friend taking minimal things in a backpack, we experience true freedom.

Non-possessiveness, the fifth *Yama*, guides us to declutter our physical, mental, and emotional space. Many psychologists in their personal stories say that they were able to experience true freedom only when they let go of their emotional baggage.

## Niyamas or personal observances

While *Yamas* are friends who help ease our interactions with the external world, *Niyamas* are friends who help create a better relationship with ourselves. *Niyamas* ensure that we reach our highest potential.

*Niyamas* describe the following five principles:

### 1. *Shauch* or Purity

*Shauch* is that pure hearted friend of ours who helps us cleanse the lens through which we see the world.

Purity is the first *Niyama*. It is a base on which the other *Niyamas* function. *Shauch* invites us to adopt practises that cleanse our thoughts and actions. *Shauch* is the foundation of modern psychology too. It says that we need to constantly question our thoughts and beliefs that we may be adopting subconsciously. And then make conscious choices to get rid of unhelpful ones.

### 2. *Santosh* or Contentment

*Santosh* is the friend who completely accepts us for who we are. It helps us find joy in each moment. Contentment is the second *Niyama*. It helps us to be comfortable in our own skin to accept ourselves and appreciate all that is happening in our lives. In psychology too, gratitude is the antidote to fear. Gratitude aligns our perspective to the abundance in our life. It invites us to be present in the moment to bring about awareness.

### 3. *Tapas* or Discipline

Our friend, *Tapas*, inspires us to improve our will power, i.e., the ability to say Yes to things we want in our lives and a firm No to things we want to eliminate from our lives.

Discipline is the third *Niyama*. *Tapas* says that we grow only when we move out of our comfort zone. It recommends self-discipline and focus on our long term goals as a method to do so. Many psychology studies prove that the ability to delay gratification and tolerate discomfort is directly correlated to success in the long term.

#### **4. *Swadhyaya* or self-introspection**

*Swadhyaya* is the friend that inspires us to smoothen our rough edges through introspection.

The fourth *Niyama* is for self- improvement. *Swadhyaya* invites us to constantly upgrade ourselves through active learning, contemplation, and practising introspection. As we reflect upon ourselves , we discover the hidden talents within ourselves. According to positive psychology, self-introspection through journaling can be an important tool that helps us become the best version of ourselves.

#### **5. *Ishwar pranidhan* or Being in sync with Divine Self**

*Ishwar Pranidhan* is the friend who helps us see the bigger picture. It guides us to partner with the Divine, declare our needs to the Divine and surrender completely, knowing completely that the Universe will connect the dots for us.

*Ishwar Pranidhan* invites us to surrender our limits to the limitless. It invites us to make our choices knowing that the Universe will support us with its limitless options which we might not be able to see, while making a choice. Thus, *Ishwar Pranidhan* empowers us as the creators of our own life.

These Mindsutra aspire to be there for you, dear reader, whenever you reach out to them. We may choose not to take the advice of our friends each time and do it our way. But we know that the intent is always to help and uplift us. Each of these 10 Mindsutras have been

elaborated in the book based on the formulas shared above. At the end of every chapter, we have given practical exercises for you to experience them for yourself.

Please think of these exercises as experiments you conduct for your own transformation and hence, we have called it the ‘Mindsutra lab’. You could learn more about the Mindsutra exercises and do it yourself by visiting our website [www.themindsutra.com](http://www.themindsutra.com). We hope that the research, personal experiences, the exercises from Positive psychology and above all, the sheer beauty of the philosophy itself inspires and helps you to be the best version of yourself.

Before we dive deep into the Mindsutra, we would like to measure your stress management awareness. As you start implementing the Mindsutra in your ‘way of being’, you can come back to this assessment and rate yourself again. This will help you ‘rate’ your own transformation. (*The assessment shared below has been taken from the book, ‘The Telomere effect’ by Elizabeth Blackburn and Elissa Epel for assessing stress management awareness*).

## ASSESSMENT

What do you do when you are stressed? Think of a situation that has bothered you a great deal. Circle your response to each question.

- When you think about dealing with this situation, how much hope and confidence do you feel vs. feelings of fear and anxiety?

0 hopeful, confident
1
2 same amount of each
3
4 fearful, anxious

- Do you feel you have whatever it takes to cope effectively with this situation?

4 not at all
3
2 Somewhat
1
0 Extremely

- How much are you caught up in repetitive thoughts about this situation?



0 not at all
1
2 Somewhat
3
4 Extremely

- How much do you avoid thinking about the situation or try not to express negative emotions?

0 not at all
1
2 Somewhat
3
4 Extremely

- How much does this situation make you feel bad about yourself?

0 not at all
1
2 Somewhat
3

4
Extremely

- How much do you think about this situation in a positive way, seeing some good that could come from it, or telling yourself statements that feel comforting or helpful, such as that you are doing the best you can?

0
not at all
1
2
Somewhat
3
4
Extremely

### TOTAL SCORE

Add up the numbers. Notice questions 2 and 6 are positive responses so the scale is reversed. The point of this informal test, not a validated research measure, is to raise awareness of your own tendencies to respond in a certain way to chronic stress. It is not a diagnostic scale.

**Total score of 11 or under.** Your stress style tends to be healthy. You already are friends with the Mindsutras shared in this book.

**Total score of 12 or over.** You are like most of us. You will definitely gain a lot while reading this book.





Yog Sutra II.35

अहसिाप्रतषिठायं तत्सन्नधिं वैरत्यागः ॥३५॥

When non-violence in speech, thought and action is established, one's aggressive nature is relinquished and those around abandon hostility in his presence.

Ahimsa - Mindsutra for constructive problem solving

Ahimsa = Empathy + Flexibility + Self-responsibility  
+ Courage → constructive problem solving



'When I feel angry,' said the Friendly Flower,  
'all I actually need is a big hug from you.'