



yoga shamana

5 Ways to Change the World by Practicing Karma Yoga

by Su-maya K. Owens

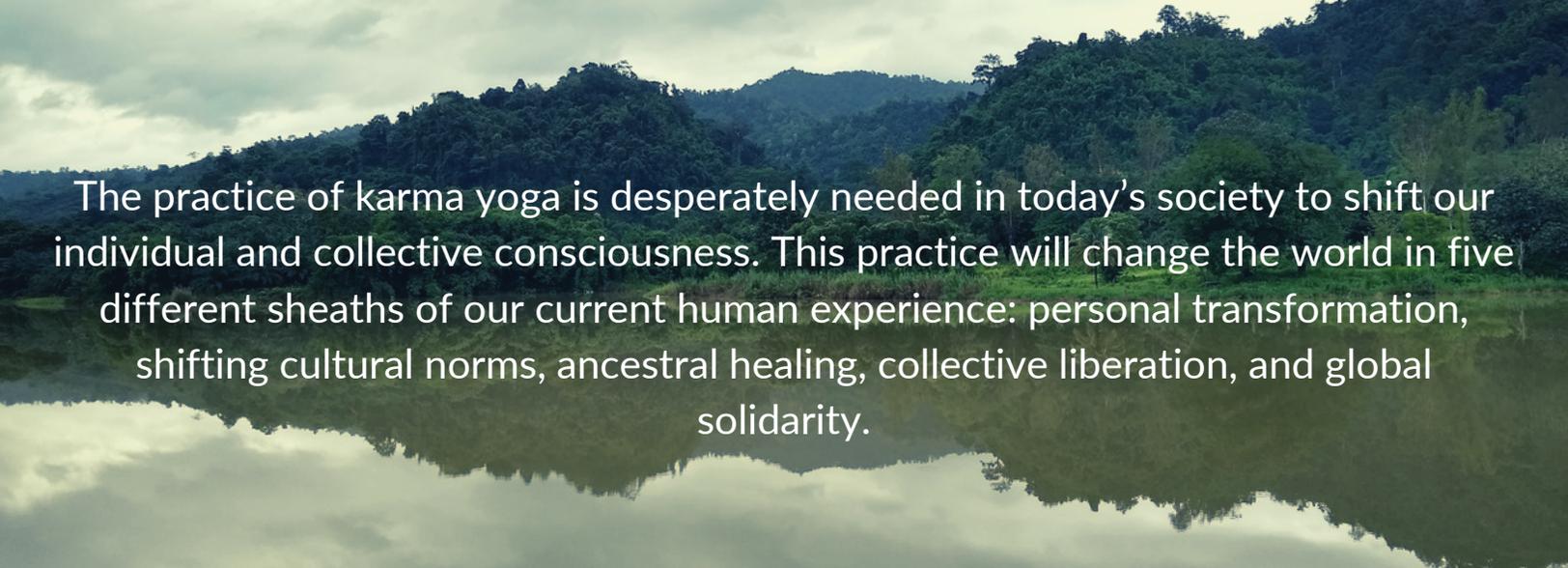
The dilemma we are facing as a Western society is that we both internally struggle with a deeper desire to find meaning and purpose in our lives, while simultaneously witnessing our individual and collective suffering on this planet and feeling disconnected from the solution to any it.

I have lived at a yogic ashram, trekked the Himalayas in Nepal, and visited shamans across the globe in search of the meaning of life. I was grieving my own trauma, desperately searching for personal healing, meanwhile buried in compassion for the collective suffering of humanity. Stories across the globe of hunger, violence, greed, torture, environmental destruction, and the list goes on... it seemed as if there was no way to overcome any of it. The grief of the planet was too heavy to bear.

Until I discovered karma yoga.

Karma, meaning “action,” in this context refers to the pursuit of liberation by practicing “yoga off the mat.” Karma yoga, also referred to as “seva” (service), is a path of spiritual awakening through living in service to others. It is by performing actions that alleviate the suffering of others that you achieve both personal and collective liberation.

However, karma yoga is no ordinary philanthropic event. Think solidarity, not charity. This is a global movement to achieve freedom for all living beings, past, present, and future. Karma yoga is not an event, a project, or fundraiser. It is a way of life, a lens through which we view our relationships to others, a practice of being present in every moment, a devotion to offering our service to others, by any means necessary.



The practice of karma yoga is desperately needed in today's society to shift our individual and collective consciousness. This practice will change the world in five different sheaths of our current human experience: personal transformation, shifting cultural norms, ancestral healing, collective liberation, and global solidarity.

- 1) **Personal transformation.** Individually, karma yoga can help to relieve the suffering of your past experiences by helping others who have lived shared experiences. For example, if you were previously in recovery, then the practice of living in service to others currently on the path to sobriety brings not only healing to your past experiences but uplifts others on a similar trajectory to recovery. By practicing karma yoga in a way that affects us deeply on a personal level, we bring passion, purpose, and clear intention to serving others.
- 2) **Shifting cultural norms.** On a cultural level, we can shift the conversation in a powerful direction by using our words and actions to ignite heartfelt discussions regarding social/cultural norms. One example of this shift is the #metoo movement. Millions of survivors across the globe shared their voices in order to shift the cultural norms and beliefs around sexual assault. This helped to not only normalize the conversation itself around sexual assault, in addition it began to shift the cultural beliefs around consent, believing survivors, and more.
- 3) **Ancestral healing.** Karma yoga can also be an effective practice for ancestral healing. It is by ending destructive, cyclical patterns in our family tree (such as abuse or alcoholism) that we prevent these patterns from reoccurring in future generations. It can also help to heal our relationships with current family members by removing toxic patterns that prevent clear, open, and honest communication.
- 4) **Collective liberation.** On a collective level, we can perform acts of service that both alleviate and prevent suffering in our communities across the globe. It may be as simple as volunteering for a local animal shelter in your local community. Or it may be organizing networks of animal rights organizations across the nation. No matter how small or large, every action that is deeply rooted in karma yoga will have a powerful impact in uplifting our communities.
- 5) **Global solidarity.** By practicing karma yoga, we begin to build relationships with others through the lens of service. This is not always reflected by a clear, direct action, but rather our intention to simply be present for the needs of others. This may be as simple as patiently, compassionately listening to the war stories of refugees. There may be nothing you can do in that moment but to simply listen. However, by building meaningful relationships based in the intention of heartfelt service & devotion, we create strength in our solidarity with people and communities across the globe. This personal, cultural, ancestral, collective, and global liberation ultimately comes from the actual practice of living in service.



The next step is karma: to take action.

How can you create the time, space, and energy in your life to transform this vision of karma yoga into reality?

Lokah Samastah Sukhino Bhavantu

“May all beings everywhere be happy and free, and may the thoughts, words, and actions of my own life contribute in some way to that happiness and freedom.”



Su-maya K. Owens, E-RYT, LMBT, AHC

is an author, teacher, mother, activist, traveler, healer, and friend. She is a devoted teacher/practitioner of yoga, massage, and ayurveda with 14 years of clinical experience in the healing arts. Her approach combines years of personal & professional studies in Purna Yoga, her experience of living and working on a yogic ashram, her travels across southeast Asia, and intensive studies with renowned Thai & ayurvedic doctors from around the world. Su-maya is also a dedicated practitioner of karma yoga, the practice of achieving a state of spiritual union by living in service to others. Her current focus on karma yoga is organizing refugee community health projects on the Thai/Myanmar border.

She has also collaborated with various nonprofits in the southeastern US such as Bounty and Soul, The Yoga Service Movement, and Women’s Wellbeing and Development Fund to offer free yoga, massage, and other wellness programs available to people of color, elderly, and other underprivileged populations. She is the owner and founder of Yoga Shamana, a holistic, private consultation practice. Her offerings include yoga & wellness workshops and retreats, private ayurvedic health consultations, business consultations for health/wellness practitioners, and professional continuing education courses for healing arts practitioners.

For more information please visit: www.yogashamana.com.