

## Humility

True practice is inherently humbling and is a natural consequence of clear perception and insight—when illusion (*viparyaya*) and delusion (*vikalpa*) begin to fade we encounter ourselves as we are. Yoga, if undertaken sincerely, reveals not only our capacity but also our limitations. It challenges and dismantles the self-image we construct of ourselves and brings us face to face with our actual condition.

We may enter practice hoping to improve or attain physical skills or remove stress and anxiety, but the deeper work of yoga is not about becoming more—it is about understanding what already is. This understanding, born of direct experience, is what humbles us. We discover that real growth lies not in conquering the body but in listening to it. The hip that remains tight and unchanging, the breath that shakes or falters, or the asana that resists our best efforts—these are not failures but moments to see ourselves honestly.

On the mat, humility begins when we stop striving to fix things or perform to an external ideal or idea of the asana and we begin to observe closely. The practice acts as a mirror, revealing not just the shape of the posture but patterns of behaviour: comparison, expectation, fear, or pride. These shape our experience more deeply than our muscles or bones. Recognising them and their effects upon us is the beginning of humility.

Humility is not an act of self-deprecation but grows from a willingness to see things as they are, without distortion. This clarity is rare because our perception is significantly influenced by the *klesas*—ignorance, ego, attachment, aversion, and clinging. These distort how we see ourselves and others. To move toward humility is to move through these layers and is achieved over prolonged periods of sustained enquiry and repeated return.

Practice matures into *sadhana* when it is guided by enquiry and investigation not just by effort. With each day on the mat, we are confronted with what we do not yet understand. We may see discrepancies between what we hope for or expect, but are these inconsistencies of the body, or projections of the mind? This ongoing quest to understand has been described as *the confidence of unknowing* because where perception is involved things can never be verified conclusively and we must live in the question. To hold yourself open to questioning as we suspend judgement so as to gather a more complete understanding reminds us that we are always students and this is the foundation of true learning.

In the realm of teaching, humility is essential. A teacher who is not humbled through their own practice cannot guide others with authenticity. To teach is to accompany a student in their learning, the role is not to impress. Yoga is not a possession that is traded; it is a shared enquiry into oneself. In a true learning relationship, both teacher and student remain engaged, sincere, and receptive to the unknown.

Humility also arises in recognising that progress is not ours to claim. One day the breath is smooth and unruffled, the asana stable and unwavering; the next day, everything unravels. Yoga offers glimpses of clarity, but not permanence. These moments of clarity are not trophies to be held and displayed—they are gifts. They come and go. We do not control them; we prepare ourselves to receive them.

To live with humility is to live in relationship with reality. We let go of the curated self that remains always self focused, in order to meet ourselves as we are. This truth is not always glamorous or comfortable. It reveals our fears and contradictions, but it also reveals our capacity for presence, for stillness, for change or transformation. This is the gift of Yoga—not just physical change, but truth. And truth, when it touches us deeply, humbles us.

Humility reminds us that we do not walk this path alone. We are part of something larger—a lineage, a community, a shared field of practice. No matter our skill or experience, we are all subject to the same principles. Yoga doesn't privilege mastery; it honours sincerity and helps us to remain teachable. Over around 40 visits to study with the BKS, Geeta and Prashant Iyengar I regarded these visits as periods in which I would submit totally to the teaching to fully absorb the experience without prior judgement.

To approach the practice daily aims not to succeed but to see. In that seeing, striving falls away. Whether in asana or pranayama the practice becomes less focused on achievement than the experience of being present to what lies within each of us. Humility is not the end of the path—it is the path. It allows us to practise with honesty, to teach with clarity, and to live simply and directly.