



NINE CALLS TO ACTION

Eradicate abuse of women in yoga:
reclaim yoga as a tool for freedom, planetary
healing and justice.

EXCERPT FROM YONI SHAKTI 2020

- 1 WITHDRAW FINANCIAL SUPPORT FROM ANY ORGANISATION OR INDIVIDUAL THAT HARMS WOMEN**
- 2 NOTICE WARNING SIGNALS, LEARN ABOUT BYSTANDERS AND BENEFICIARIES SO YOU CAN HONOUR YOUR INTUITION**
- 3 ASK QUESTIONS OF TEACHERS, TRAINERS, GURUS, RETREAT AND STUDIO OWNERS**
- 4 LISTEN TO THE SISTERS, SURVIVORS, WHISTLEBLOWERS: TESTIMONY IS EVIDENCE**
- 5 SHARE WHAT YOU NOTICE: CALL OUT HARM AND CALL IN HELP.**
- 6 REFUSE TO KEEP SECRETS**
- 7 NAME NAMES, JOIN DOTS**
- 8 CENTRE THE MARGINS, GATHER IN CIRCLES**
- 9 DECOLONISE YOGA TO DISMANTLE HARMFUL SYSTEMS OF OPPRESSION THAT DAMAGE EVERYONE**





These calls to action are practical, simple and direct. I describe each one below, together with examples of the healing that can occur when these actions are taken.

1. WITHDRAW FINANCIAL SUPPORT

- Without the continued financial support of women, these organisations will not last very long.
- Immediately withdraw your financial support from any organisation that has evidence of abuse of students and devotees
- Do not offer any further financial support until reparations are made to the survivors of the abuse.
- Inform the organisation about your decision and the reasons for it.
- Instead, redirect money towards individuals and training outfits that do not carry the stench of old fears and new scandals.
- Consider what kinds of oppressive systems and hierarchies your money feeds:
- Is it acceptable to purchase items or trainings offered by institutions that profit from enslavement or exploitation?
- Could you direct your money to fair-trade businesses and/or local teachers and training operations that serve your community so that they benefit from the power of your financial choices?
- Don't buy new books from institutions that harm women – borrow, or buy second hand instead...

If we recognise the role that yoginis have to play as agents of social justice, we can choose consciously where we direct our money, and then we can make a difference to the way that yoga is shared.

Some people have also advocated boycotting the books produced by organisations supporting abusive gurus and teachers. Certainly, to purchase books directly from these ashrams and schools supports abuse endemic within the institutions that publish them. And, there are some authentic teachings of value to be learnt from the writings of the gurus. If there are books you would like to study, then consider, instead of a total boycott, purchasing only second-hand copies, or borrowing from your sisters. I don't see any particular value in not using the books you already have. Even after the revelations of the Australian Royal Commission, I continued to find some value in the efficacy and potency of many of the tantric teachings in Satyananda's books. I have every Bihar School of Yoga book published prior to 2014 on my shelves, and I referred to them in *Yoni Shakti* because they present teachings that I have never found elsewhere, and because I feel it is important to reclaim and represent these teachings as empowerments. Although I personally will neither support or endorse the organisation, nor ever return to those ashrams, I don't think there is value in getting rid of the books – and I am happy to lend you mine! Don't buy them, borrow them, and critique the context in which they were written.





2. NOTICE WARNING SIGNALS: LEARN ABOUT BYSTANDERS AND BENEFICIARIES, SO YOU CAN HONOUR YOUR INTUITION

- Be aware that many people benefit from their proximity to the power of abusers, and others stand by and permit abuse to happen by not calling it out. Beneficiaries and bystanders are invested in perpetuating these systems, and together they collude to normalise abuse: this makes it very difficult to even notice our own intuitive responses. This is not our fault. Paying attention to our intuition is key, but often difficult.
- If something feels wrong in your body, notice. This is the first early warning sign, and it is the key to all the others. Be aware that the bystanders and the beneficiaries who normalise abuses will do their best to shut down individual intuitive response. The impact of this can be to ‘numb’ us to our own intuition’s calling. Even in the midst of this, know you can trust your body’s signals.
- Be guided by the thirteen warning signals revealing patterns of abuse, and be vigilant about experiences that give rise to *any bodily sense* that “something’s not right” even if bystanders and beneficiaries seek to dismiss your instincts. Notice embodied intuitive responses like nausea, revulsion, gripping, or anything that makes the hairs stand up on the back of your neck, or your skin crawl.
- Just because you can’t verbalise what it is that you find repugnant or sickening doesn’t mean that it’s not worth paying attention. In fact, the opposite is true.
- The stronger the physical reaction and the less able you are to verbalise an intense embodied response, the more likely it is to be a powerful and instinctive warning sign. These are intuitive early warning signs that we ignore at our peril.
- If you think something about a person or a place smells bad, or leaves you with an unpleasant taste, or makes you sick, then pay attention.
- If you can’t put your finger on it, but you just ‘feel uncomfortable’, that will be a sign that it is not a comfortable place to be in. Pay attention to this and consider leaving. Go somewhere else (anywhere will do), just so you can remember what it feels like to be at your ease. Then compare this with the situation which made you feel uncomfortable, and notice the differences.

Listening to intuition in a culture of abuse that is maintained by beneficiaries and bystanders can be very difficult indeed. Sometimes we miss subtle signs from our own bodies. This is not our fault. In cultures where abuse is normalised and pervasive, it is often very hard to hear our own intuitive response. And so sometimes the body resorts to powerful visceral demonstrations of disgust that communicate directly through physiology. For example, four hours after I first arrived at the Satyananda Ashram in Munger in December 1997, I began to vomit. I didn’t stop vomiting all night. I vomited for fourteen hours. It was not because I had food poisoning or gastric flu or anything specifically the matter with my digestive system, it was because the place made me feel sick. Quite literally. I couldn’t verbalise it, I just felt there was something that I couldn’t stomach. I left the next day, and the moment I stepped outside of the gates, I felt better. I never quite trusted the place and never returned, and even in other venues run by the same organisation, the visceral intensity of my first response to the Munger Ashram had alerted me to something that my intuition knew, even if I couldn’t consciously make sense of it until





seventeen years later. In the ten years that our young family visited Satyananda in the Rikhia ashram I never once let my two small boys out of my sight. Other people offered to mind them, and other parents willingly left their young children unattended in the ashram, in order to be free to do 'karma yoga' tasks for the guru, but I had a feeling in my gut that literally wouldn't let me leave my children in that place. In hindsight, the intensity of the Munger vomiting, even if I didn't understand it, was an early warning sign that helped to protect me and my children.

3. ASK QUESTIONS. ASK MORE QUESTIONS. IF YOU DON'T GET RESPECTFUL ANSWERS, KEEP ASKING QUESTIONS.

If you find yourself in a yoga teaching environment where you disagree with what is being taught, or feel confused or doubtful about the benefits of the practice, or if it doesn't feel comfortable to you, then ask questions. Keep asking questions:

- “Why do we do it this way?” or,
- “Is there is an alternative?” or,
- “What happens if we do this another way?” or,
- “Is it necessary to do it this way?” or even,
- “I’m curious, what if...” and ask for guidance on situations where perhaps an alternative might be necessary, for example, “What if I’m bleeding?”, “What if this hurts my knee?”, “What if my back twinges when I do this practice?” etc., etc.
- Be specific, be insistent and be curious.
- Ask follow-up questions like:
 - “And is this suitable for every stage of the menstrual cycle?”
 - “Would this be suitable for me/my sister because...” [select as appropriate:]
 - “I’m/she’s currently in perimenopause”
 - “I have/ she has an IUD” or, “I’m/she’s breastfeeding”
 - “I’m /she’s recovering from surgery/ I have an auto-immune disorder”.

This doesn't have to be aggressive or confrontational, they are genuine enquiries.

- Only stay if you get helpful answers that welcome your queries, and open a range of alternative ways to practise.
- *Leave immediately* if you get answers like “We do it this way because Guruji says so”, or “This is the classical practice. We always do it this way”, or even “This is the right way to do it, the way it’s always been done”, or “This is the way for everyone to do this”.
- If you get an answer like: “This is the way it’s described in the ancient sacred texts”, then you could follow through with: “Yes, thank you so much. Which sacred texts? Which edition do you recommend? Which translation do you prefer, or are you reading from the original? I’d love the references please. It’s for a project I’m working on.”

When my Thailand colleague questioned Swami Vivekananda at Agama Yoga about the origins





of the Agama teachings on the menstrual cycle, she was told their source was ‘an ancient tantric text’, but nobody told her what text, when it was written or where she could find it. We knew that the teacher’s teacher at Agama was Gregorian Bivolaru, and that he claimed to have written a three-hundred-and-four-page book on menstruation entitled, *The Mystery of Menstruation. the Physiological Enigma of Women*, so I wondered if the source of the Agama teaching was in Bivolaru’s book, and I asked my scholarly friends to help me locate it. We discovered that Bivolaru had not written this book, and that in fact the author is Walter Isidor Siegmeister (1903-1965), writing under the pseudonym Raymond W. Bernard. My colleague didn’t get a good answer to her question, and our research revealed subterfuge and academic theft. These may seem like scholarly quibbles, but if you don’t get straight answers to simple questions like these, be very suspicious about the veracity of any other claims any teacher makes.



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4. LISTEN TO THE SISTERS: TESTIMONY IS EVIDENCE

If a sister shares that she is frightened or repulsed or otherwise worried by any behaviours of a teacher or an organisation, then:

- Listen in.
- Listen more. Let her be heard.
- Believe her.
- Let her know that you are taking her seriously and that you will stand up for her.
- Encourage her to trust in the signs of her own body.
- Affirm that her response is valuable, especially if it is different from what she is being told to feel.
- Ask her what she needs now.
- Ask her if she wants you do anything about what she is telling you.
- Encourage her to do what she needs to do to protect herself.
- Offer practical support.
- Offer to support her in making an exit from the situation or relationship she describes, if that's what she wants.
- Again, affirm the reality of her experience, let her know that she is heard.
- Know that it is powerful just to listen. It is healing to be heard.

It is empowering just to be heard and taken seriously. Remember that the term 'gossip' has been used to demean women's information-sharing networks. It can save lives. It is the secret service, the 'military intelligence' of the subaltern, of the vulnerable and the marginalised. What we share between ourselves in the privacy of friendship are the warnings that protect us from the powerful who can harm us. The word gossip derives from the Old English term 'God-sib', short for 'God-sibling' which means the people close to you, whom you would trust with the lives of your precious children or family – the ones who would care for your dear ones if you passed away. These are the people we trust the most, and so 'Gossip' is trusted information that can protect us.

The second testimony I received from women who had been trafficked to the Atman Federation Yoga retreat revealed just how crucial the presence is of a listening sister to a vulnerable woman in a dangerous situation. This sister managed to escape from the retreat centre at the eleventh hour, before being raped by Bivolaru, like her other friends. She only managed to escape because one of her friends continued to listen to her and to believe in what she was saying. She told me that this friend was "... my saving grace. She was the reason I was able to stay lucid enough to say no, this isn't right for me, and leave. I am eternally grateful for her."

Listening empowers both the speaker and the listener. The more we listen the more we hear, and the more we hear, the more powerful we become, because what one sister shares can affirm what another sister experiences, as the next call to action shows:





5. SHARE WHAT YOU NOTICE: CALL OUT HARM AND CALL IN HELP.

Listening is important. Being heard is empowering. And sometimes also it is vital to offer to share the information that you have heard.

- Ask the sister who shares with you if she wants for you to share what she has told you with someone else.
- Offer to share the information with people who can work together to stop the harm.
- When we call out harm, then we can call in help.
- Sometimes we need to go to people within the organisations, and sometimes we need to go to agencies outside of the organisations, and sometimes both.
- The more the information is shared the more powerful the case against the perpetrators becomes.

When Julie Salter, 63, who had worked as Swami Vishnu Devananda's personal assistant for eleven years shared her experiences in a Facebook post in 2019, she empowered many other women to step forward and share their own experiences. As more and more testimonies came to light, the Executive Board of the International Sivananda Vedanta Organisations (ISVO) opened up an investigation. But the level and historic presence of institutional betrayal meant that many survivors were not willing to participate in the official internal investigations. With crowdfunding from over 1700 community members, an independent investigation was launched. Project SATYA (Sivananda. Accountability. Truth Seeking. Yogic Action) encouraged women with testimony to share what they had experienced, so that the entire group of women together could be properly heard. They called out harm and called in help. Similarly, the brave testimony of Karen Rain, who was the first woman to speak out about her experiences with Pattabhi Jois inspired Matthew Remski to conduct his extensive investigations into the abuses within the Ashtanga Vinyasa yoga community. By calling out the harm that Karen and Julie had experienced, it became possible to call in help in the form of extensive investigations that brought awareness of abuses into the public eye.

One of the huge obstacles to sharing is secrecy, and telling secrets is a key call to action...





6. REFUSE TO KEEP SECRETS

Secrecy can be used to control victims and to protect perpetrators of abuse. It is a tool of shame and disconnection. The obligation to 'keep it a secret' confers a perversely disempowering privilege upon the secret's keeper. The privilege is the privilege of intimacy, but it gives the secret-holder no power, because to share the secret outside of the intimacy is to risk being shamed and exposed. Secrecy also separates multiple victims from each other, even if they have been asked to hold the same secret, because none of the individual secret-holders can connect with any of the others. Shame and secrecy keep them apart, and lets the perpetrator off the hook.

When the celebrity teacher tells the young student he has digitally raped: 'Let this be our little secret', or when the elderly celibate monk tells the adolescent girl he has raped: 'Nobody else must know about this', then the obligation to keep the secret becomes a shameful burden. The victims may be persuaded to believe for a time that they are the 'special ones', but this 'specialness' is an isolation that continues to damage them and leaves the perpetrator free to harm others in the same way, over and over again, safe in the cloak of secrecy that hides all the individual victims from each other.

- If a person in power asks you to keep a secret about their behaviours, ask 'Why don't you want anyone else to know about this? What are you ashamed of?'
- If you have in the past kept secrets for the perpetrators of abuse, and it is safe to share them, please reveal them now, to prevent further abuses.
- If you hold secret information about any behaviours (including financial fiddling) that are incongruent with the publicly expressed ethics and spiritual intention of an organisation, then consider making that information public.
- If you are asked in the future to keep aspects of behaviour or information hidden from particular individuals, refuse.
- If you know of secret misdemeanours, little or large, within hidden inner circles, and it is safe to speak of them, then do so.

Secrecy is a powerful tool in maintaining structures and cultures of abuse. Know that the structures of deception that keep small things hidden are the same structures of deception that keep large things hidden. Everyone who keeps even small misdemeanours hidden in secrecy colludes in supporting a wider culture of secrecy and subterfuge that hides greater abuses.

When my husband lived at Satyananda Yoga Centre in London, we were part of an 'inner circle' that collectively held a secret that was never shared with any students. The resident and visiting swamis daily smoked so much marijuana as to impede their judgments and compromise their respiratory function and capacity to teach. Nobody in the 'inner circle' ever divulged the secret source of the clouds of smoke that wafted through the hall. The job of the inner circle secret-keepers was simply to light more incense.

The inner circle all knew the swamis were addicted to getting stoned, and that the house smelt of weed, but nobody told the students, because to do so would get you kicked out of the inner circle. Nobody ever revealed what was going on. In fact we went to great lengths to protect our teacher from discovery in other teaching environments and enable her habit, to the extent of smuggling her up the attic stairs of an eight-storey warehouse to hide on the roof and smoke





joints in the tea-breaks of a pranayama workshop she was teaching.

Now, in comparison with the terrible abuses that were revealed by the Australian Royal Commission of investigation, dope-smoking in the London Satyananda Centre may seem very inconsequential. But the structures of power that kept this small thing hidden from students were the same structures of power that enabled and protected very damaging abuses. Those of us who knew what was happening in the kitchen before the students arrived were invited to enter into the 'privilege of secrecy' which conferred the 'benefits' of proximity to power upon those who agreed to keep the secrets.

Refusing to keep secrets often involves naming the names, and this is a key part of sharing the information, as the next call to action reveals.



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7. NAME NAMES, JOIN DOTS

One of the triumphs of patriarchy is to separate women from each other and isolate our experiences from each other by making us feel ashamed or frightened to speak the truth for fear of reprisal or recrimination. Sometimes all it takes is one brave person naming names to give everyone the keys to escape from the isolating prison of shame and separateness; sometimes it is dangerous to be a whistle-blower; sometimes those who name names are ostracised, vilified and threatened or harmed. So only name names when it is safe to do so.

- If you know for certain that someone has harmed a sister, and if it is safe to do so, please have the courage to speak up,
- If you have observed, or heard that harm is being done, and it is safe to speak up, then name the person causing the harm.
- If it is not safe to address the person in public, or even if it is, and you do not have the courage to speak up right now, then share the information you know with somebody else later.
- It is only when we speak up and name names that we can begin to end the harm perpetrators cause.
- When we speak the names of those who have harmed us or our sisters, then we empower others who have also suffered in the same way to speak up too, and together we begin to join up the dots.
- When we share together, we share our power and become strong.

Sometimes women hold their shame alone in secret for years, sometimes a woman is isolated for a lifetime because she has never revealed the truth to a single living soul. Once in a women's circle of grief and praise, where thirty women gathered to share, one woman took courage from her safety in the circle to speak of an experience that she had never previously shared with anyone. She told the sisters what happened to her when she had been encouraged to consult privately with a 'fake guru' who was convicted years later of multiple sexual assaults and rape. She wept with relief as she said 'I never named his name before, but I feel called to name it here: Mohan Singh did this to me.' and her speaking of this name was an opening for another voice to be heard in the circle. It was the voice of a woman who said simply "Me too." The second sister had received the same mistreatment by the same man. She also had never named the abuse, nor had she named the abuser. Neither of the two sisters had any idea of the other's suffering. And neither knew that it had been caused by the same man. They wept together, and then they could begin to heal because in naming the names, they joined up the dots. When we speak the unspeakable, we share the power to heal. Name Names!





8. CENTRE THE MARGINS, GATHER IN CIRCLES

Whenever you get the chance,

- Step into alliance with the victims of sexual abuse in yoga and place their experience at the centre of the circle.
- Affirm your support through the previous calls to action.
- Gather in circles, not straight lines, and invite those who have been pushed to the margins to occupy their place in the circle. Give them space to be heard.
- Sit in a circle and listen up.
- Protect the speakers of the truth and encircle them with love.
- Make time and space to hear the voices that have not been heard before: let the voices of the silenced ones be the focus of attention, let their truths be spoken clearly, and receive their words with honour and respect, not whispered shamefully at the edges so that nobody can hear.

These gatherings can be healing circles of powerful connection that are both protective and potent. Once, in a circle sharing about the Great Wisdom Goddesses, the quiet voice of an ex-nun from a Tibetan Buddhist long meditation retreat was welcomed. A refugee from an abusive teacher, she had survived years of traumatisation, sleep deprivation, abuse of tantric methods and sexual grooming and coercion to become a 'consort'. She had been imprisoned, confined and had witnessed other sisters being abused. Herself and another became suicidal, others developed life threatening conditions. This woman developed complex post traumatic stress disorder, and was in constant pain from injuries caused by enforced yogic practice in below zero conditions with no clothes or heating that had damaged her spine. She had been silenced and threatened by the teachers. She and others have been ostracised for speaking out and for requesting an independent investigation. She was broken and healing, she was strong and wise. And once she sensed she was in a safe circle she began to speak. Held in the supportive energy of the circle, she felt empowered to share her wisdom. She spoke with passion about her direct perception of the practice of Varjayogini, the wrathful red wisdom goddess who had been the focus of one of the traditional Tibetan Buddhist ritual meditations within her lineage. She shared a potent insight about the healing power of Vajrayogini (called Chinnamasta Mahavidya within the Great Wisdom Goddess circle). The depth of her wisdom and the authentic truth of her voice, which had been silenced for years, was heard within the circle. Everyone listened to the voice that had been silenced. This was part of her healing.

When we stand in solidarity with victims and dissidents, outcastes and whistle-blowers, then we stand for truth: we bring to the centre what has been pushed out to the edges. We reclaim the power from the people who have stolen it, and give it back to the women from whom it was taken. We remove the thieves of shakti from the centre stage, and we give space to their victims. This is a way to centre the margins.

I choose always to work in a circle, and not to line up students in straight lines, with the teacher at the front. This circling of the students can be a radical calling in of restorative justice, because it dismantles the patriarchal power dynamic by sharing power in the space: in a circle, we are all on the same side, nobody is commanding all the attention, and everybody can be seen and heard. Even this simple act of replacing military straight lines with circles is a step towards





healing. In these circles we can re-establish the possibilities for healing justice. Gathering in a circle welcomes everyone's voice, and this is a means to begin dismantling the harmful systems of oppression that damage everyone. This dismantling is part of the process of decolonisation, which is the ninth call to action...



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9. DECOLONISE YOGA TO DISMANTLE HARMFUL SYSTEMS OF OPPRESSION THAT DAMAGE EVERYONE.

When we answer any of these nine calls to action, we are doing the groundwork needed to dismantle oppressive structures of power imbalances that are the framework for inequality and abuse everywhere. First, we identify the abuses and harm that they cause, and then we begin to understand the structures that perpetuate them, so that we can take them apart and create better ways to begin to move towards decolonising yoga. This is not a quick fix, this is a big job. As I outlined earlier, it is the historic injustices of colonial theft, deception and enslavement that enable the commodifying processes of capitalism: this is the basis of transnational and corporate yoga. It is a toxic, racist, misogynist legacy. All of the abuses, everyday misogynies and disempowerments of women described in this preface derive from, are facilitated by, and rest upon this base. They are just some of the many painful symptoms of a fundamentally unjust system that creates and maintains inequalities of privilege and power according to race, sex and class. There are steps we can take to dismantle these harmful systems of oppression that damage everyone:

- Recognise that we are all in this together: capitalism is the foundation of our current social structures, so schools and workplaces enforce its values, and we have been all been formed by these values and the injustices they normalise.
- Educate ourselves and awaken awareness of social injustices that derive from systemic and structural sexism and racism (the bibliography at the end of this preface is a good place to start).
- Everyone has a part to play, whatever the colour of our skin, and whatever our heritage: we all have toxic legacies to uncover, and becoming conscious of the impact of colonial history upon ourselves, our families and our communities is a painful process.
- To become aware of these multiple injustices is the first step towards de-colonisation: of our minds, hearts, and world.
- The next step is to call out the injustices we see so that we can call in help to eradicate them.

Those of us who want to end sexual violence and abuse of women everywhere, including within the yoga world, now have an immense opportunity: it is the opportunity to support collective awakenings of consciousness to the reality of colonialism as the source of those disempowering and often exploitative structures within which so much modern yoga teaching has been shared. To awaken this awareness is to begin the process of decolonisation.

Consider now that the tools we use to dismantle the systems of oppression that harm women in yoga, these Nine Calls to Action – are the very same tools that we can use to begin to dismantle the systems of colonial oppression that harm indigenous peoples, peoples of colour, and marginalised, vulnerable people. Firstly, we withdraw financial support from organisations that perpetuate harm by taking our business to community groups and allies (Call to Action #1), and then we heed the warning signs and honour intuition (Call to Action #2), so that the same embodied wisdom that alerts us to what harms our sisters, also serves to awaken us to how others in the margins are harmed too. Once we have become conscious of this harm, then we can we ask questions about it (Call to Action #3), and in asking questions we shall open up opportunities to listen to the voices of those who have been harmed by these systems (Call





to Action #4). Then we will be in a position to share what we have noticed (Call to Action #5), to call out harm and call in help (Call to Action #5). This is likely to involve refusing to keep secrets, naming names and joining dots (Calls to Action #6 and #7). The environments in which we can safely do all this will likely involve gatherings in circles so that we can centre the margins (Call to Action #8).

These nine steps to reveal and prevent abuse of women in yoga can thus help us to reveal and prevent other forms of oppression. When we see intersections between these and all other injustices, and we understand how they are all part of a larger system of injustice that damages everyone, then we can know how to take it apart. When we can see the joins then we can see also how to dismantle this harmful structure. And this is how these calls to action in support of the survivors of sexual violence may help us begin to decolonise yoga together.

This is ‘intersectionality’ in action – if we are familiar with the tools that we use to support women who have been victims of misogynistic sexual violence in controlling patriarchal and commercial yoga institutions, and we can see how their oppression intersects with the injustices of race and class based harms, then we can use these same tools to reveal and eradicate the inequalities and injustices of structural racism, and work together to create more liberatory structures of teaching, learning and living. This is a necessarily post-lineage activity, by which I mean that these Calls to Action cannot be answered whilst we privilege the power of the gurus and teachers who name their own lineage as the ‘only way’. Post-lineage Yoga is a term coined by Dr Theodora Wildcroft in her 2019 PhD thesis. It does not mean to be anti-lineage, or even to be without any lineage: at its best, it means to be respectful of the valuable teachings that lineages have preserved yoga, and to work to share those teachings in responsive and empowering ways. Clearly, there exist disempowering commercial yoga studios and corporate yoga brands that are also post-lineage, but in its most liberatory form, post-lineage yoga can be a very powerful tool for decolonisation of yoga. Post-lineage yoginis and yogis are free to move beyond obedience to lineage and hierarchy, and free from obligations to operate within other harmful patriarchal structures, including the colonising commodification of the yoga industrial complex.

To answer the Nine Calls to Action we need to be independent of any lineage and free from restrictive affiliations to any abusive gurus. It is from this place we can seek to empower others also to find freedom from the intersecting network of oppressive hierarchies that are at work in every single yoga ‘lineage’ I have ever encountered. I used to say ‘almost every’, but now I see these oppressions are indeed everywhere, and have been compounded by the capitalist commodification of yoga and yoga teacher trainings. I’m proudly post-lineage, refusing to support those organisations in any way and committed to revealing the truth about the harm they cause, and I invite you to consider what it might feel like for you to step outside of the constraints of the single lineage affiliations that limit our capacity to work for freedom.





“LOOKING FOR CRACKS”: CLOSINGS AND OPENINGS

As this preface moves towards its close, and opens into the rest of *Yoni Shakti*, I recall the comments of a Canadian reader of *Yoni Shakti* who wrote to me in anger and confusion in December 2019: ‘I am sorry to not read in your book anywhere about the abuses of these gurus that were your teachers’ she said. ‘I don’t want to source from teachers who have been receiving teachings from Satyananda for years and years. No. So I need to know that they are in this guru relationship with a sex offender if I am to buy and learn from their books.’ I wrote to thank this reader for writing to me, and promised I would do my best to clarify and explore all the hidden abuses that I have come to learn about since 2014, and some that I knew about before, but which had been censored. This has been my intention with this preface, and it continues in my commitment to support any teacher who seeks to identify and remove any and every aspect of teaching yoga with a power dynamic that leads to abuse. I want to break any cycles of that, and to support those who also want to be free from these cycles. My Canadian reader shared her understanding that these behaviours of abuse can be “... passed on subconsciously also. Through the ways that we have been taught. Through our relationships with teachers. And gurus... It’s still a culture of silence, and the ignorant ones follow ... I am in the process of trying to figure out how to move forward. The cover-up, and my ignorance is huge for me to integrate.”

Her experience may perhaps be similar to your experience. What next?

Together, with good information, widely shared, we can educate and inform ourselves, so that, like my perceptive Canadian reader, we can offer teachings that integrate a welcome for the healing justice that can begin to arise once we have revealed the truth. “I see a lot of cracks in the foundations of yoga, and how it is being passed on. This is the point for me. So I am looking for cracks. That’s what I am seeing. Of course! I am so grateful that you were the catalyst for me to see the fissure and be able to find the crack. It seems obvious. It wasn’t clear to me. Until now. Until now.”

I trust that this preface may be of some help for those of you who are looking for cracks, and those of you who already have found many fissures in the foundations of transnational yoga. The cracks and the fissures join up: for all the abuses within residential yoga community environments that I have described prompt us to consider the deeply imbalanced power relationships in yoga lineages, and indeed in our patriarchal and colonial culture as a whole. This is the biggest crack of all, the one from which all the fissures come.

I shall be continuing to heighten awareness of these important cracks and fissures in the foundations of the transnational yoga industry in all of my trainings, workshops and retreats, live and online, and through discussions and lectures related to *Yoni Shakti* and Total Yoga Nidra. I feel it is a crucial feminist, anti-racist, decolonising and post-lineage project to raise consciousness of the colonial and capitalist structures that support the patriarchal hierarchies of the ashrams and yoga communities within which abuse has occurred. These structures are implicitly exploitative. Exposing their power structures helps us to prevent everyday misogynist injustice and future abuses.





OVER TO YOU...

So now dear reader, as this preface closes, what began as a warning becomes an invitation. It is an invitation into the rest of *Yoni Shakti*, now uncensored and revised. It is an invitation also, if you choose, to step with a different awareness back now into the world of your yoga, your practice, your life...

Perhaps you can hear the voices I have shared, and perhaps you can feel how these voices speak of a truth that is larger than their own individual story?

Perhaps you can hear the whole chorus of conversations together now? And, just like the birds who sing together in the dawn, welcoming the light each morning, every single voice is welcome, for it is the songs of all the birds together that make the beauty of this chorus, each singing in her own voice. Our conversations together are like this: it's not just the single song of one bird that we hear at dawn, but the multiplicity of voices. Hearing all the voices, speaking of what has not been heard before, changes how we see the world, and empowers us to change it together for the better. This is powerful.

As this preface closes, I proffer you now an invitation:

Would you be willing to listen in to these conversations, and to hear the voices at the margins, those who perhaps you never noticed before? And would you be willing to welcome what you hear? And perhaps, in this listening, in this welcoming, would you be willing also to let your own voice be heard? Would you be willing for your voice to become a part of this chorus of conversations about what was previously unspeakable, shameful and hidden?

How might it feel to truly listen, and to speak out, and to be heard?

I invite you to step into your yoga with the intention to welcome reparation for all who have been harmed by the oppressive structures that have held yoga for so long. I invite you to raise awareness of these structures, to free yourself and others from harm. I invite you to decolonise your yoga practice and your life, to commit with a renewed openness to listening to survivors, to welcoming whistle-blowers, to hearing your sisters. I invite you to open your ears to the voices of those who have been silenced, to explore what it means to decolonise yoga. I invite you to attend to the voices of the black and brown people of colour, and to the indigenous and marginalised people who are already doing this work of decolonisation. I invite you to welcome healing justice: step into a world of listening to each other so that we may we open up a chorus of conversations that can change the world, and make it a safer place for everybody's daughters, all our sisters.





DAWNING CHORUS FREEDOM SONG

*Let the voices of the daughters fill our ears,
Let the voices of the sisters touch our hearts,
Let the voices of the mothers raise the roof:
For our daughters are not safe
Within these structures of abuse,
And our sisters will not thrive beneath this rigid rule of force.
Now the mothers call for justice, for the voices to be heard:
Let the stories of the damage
Heal the harm that has been done;
Let our voices all together sing
In multiplicity
For our power is in connection and respect for all of life,
And listening to the voices speak enables all to heal,
For when every voice is welcomed, and when every voice is heard,
Then the power we have to speak our truth
Sets the whole world free.*

*Can you stand with me together so that we can stop this harm?
Will you declare that it's enough now, would you sign support for this?
Will you stand up for survivors so we bring an end to this?
Would you declare your willingness to change what damages?
Will you declare your willingness to call out harm and
Call in help?
Will you raise your hand for justice, reparation and what's right?
Will you raise your hand to show you want to make the future safe
For the daughters seeking yoga to practise without harm?
Can you honour the survivors in the circles that we hold,
Joining forces with the outcastes, whistle-blowers, allies all?
Bring the margins to the centre, and un-silence all the truths,
Welcome what has been unspoken and uncover what was hid,
Bring it all into the circles to be held together now, for
When we are in a circle we are all on the same side,
And together we take action to bring healing justice in:
Will you stand on the same side as us, together, circled round,
As we gather to support all sisters calling for the truth
In this movement
Towards justice, to bring healing to this earth?*

*Let our voices all together sing in multiplicity
For our power is in connection and respect for all of life,
And listening to the voices speak, enables all to heal,
For when every voice is welcomed, and when every voice is heard,
Then the power we have to speak the truth, this sets the whole world free.*

*Uma Dinsmore-Tuli
Stroud, 2020*

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UNDERSTANDING THE BIGGER PICTURE: THE YOGA INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

Commodification is the process by which specific and indigenous items or services are transformed into standard commodities that can be traded internationally for profit by global corporations. Commodification is key part of capitalism, which operates within a larger system of colonialism: stealing resources and people from one place and selling them in another. Yoga has been colonised and commodified by transnational yoga organisations that invade and occupy a land (in this case, the field of yoga knowledge), extract resources from the place and people of origin (practices, techniques and understandings developed by communities of practitioners) and then market the resulting commodities (courses, trainings and retreats are sold to students and teachers) to create profit for investors and studio owners.

Many of the original structures that preserved yoga teaching are patriarchal, so these processes and structures of colonisation and commodification have compounded the inherent misogyny within these controlling frameworks to create cultures where sexual violence is normalised and/or hidden within commercial structures. The inequalities that lead to sexual violence are also built into the foundations of commercial yoga studios, and these underlying colonial structures and capital investments make it difficult for such studios to eradicate the injustices and misogyny at their heart, because they are still invested in maintaining the status quo which made the original commodification possible.

Commercial studios are resistant to opening up a space for discussing sexual violence in the yoga world. Oppressive networks of abuse that perpetuate harm in yoga teaching environments cannot be properly addressed or dismantled within capitalist yoga studios, because their commercial demands operate along patriarchal lines and cannot tolerate or admit any discussions that might critique these profit driven, exploitative colonial foundations.

This is why two separate commercial yoga studios in London in July 2018 prevented myself and other yoga colleagues from running workshops to reveal the abuses of #MeTooinyoga. We were told by senior studio management that there was insufficient interest. My colleague and I failed to persuade these commercial studios that this was a hot topic and that we could successfully fill places on the proposed events we proposed, and so in the end we chose to organise our own event independently of either studio. Why am I telling this story? Because the commercial studio's refusal to address the issue of sexual abuse in yoga is not just about feminism and misogyny, or about the abuse of women by spiritual teachers, it runs much deeper than this. The basic model for commercial studios is exploitative: it exploits teachers and their energies, and the energies of the volunteer helpers, it exploits friendship networks of women, and it supports celebrity culture because it is more profitable than grass roots yoga community work. All this permits and condones continuing abuses of women within its structures, because the culture that exploits yoga teachers and students for profit is rooted in the same culture that condones all other abuses and inequalities, including the abuse of women by spiritual teachers, as well as racism, homophobia and ableism. It works like this: the underlying colonial commodification of the yoga industrial complex is part of a patriarchal capitalist structure that values every exchange only according to profit. Within this monetised structure all the people and resources involved are expendable and

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dispensable. Nurture, attention, and loving care are not quantifiable in monetary terms within this model. At a family scale, this is the model that results in mothering, caring and domestic work being largely unpaid; at a planetary level it's the rationale that regards the pollution or destruction of ecosystems by extractive industries to be simply an acceptable means to turn a profit, and throughout history this is the same model that justifies colonial thefts, deceptions and enslavements. This model exists as part of a vast global framework of intersecting oppressions that include racism and sexism as well as class inequality and ageism, ableism, and violence and injustice based on sexuality and gender. The oppressive hierarchies that normalise the exploitation of women in ashrams and yoga centres are part of the same set of technologies of oppression that we know as colonialism: the process of colonisation harms and brutalises everyone in the end, starting with those who have the least power under patriarchy, i.e. women, people of colour and marginalised peoples.

Capitalism is the engine of colonialism and transnational yoga has been colonised by capitalism. Turning yoga into a global industry has compounded all the abusive hierarchical tendencies that were always already present at the heart of many of the patriarchal organisations that have preserved yoga for so long. What we learnt in 2018 as we struggled to convince two corporate yoga organisations to support events that intended to discuss the dynamics of power within yoga teaching environments that permit the abuse of women, was that these organisations were never going to support this, because exposing and dismantling the structures of oppression that lead to the abuse of women would also expose the colonising tendencies of the capitalist organisations themselves. We needed to operate independently. When we stepped outside of the profit motivation of these organisations, we were free to explore whatever we chose.

If we wish to take action to prevent future harm, or even to have a discussion about the harm that has already been done (that was the topic for our July 2018 evening in London), then we need to do this outside of the commercial studios that uphold the capitalist values of colonised and commodified yoga. And if we want to take action to dismantle the colonialist structures of oppression that harms women, indigenous people, people of colour and differently abled students in yoga environments, then we first need to recognise that all of these harms are connected: they intersect. I revealed this intersection in the prediction that was excised from the first edition of *Yoni Shakti* and I regret that I did not address these issues, and articulate the need to decolonise yoga at the time. There are many excellent resources which do address this vital issue, and I have listed a selection of them at the end of this Prologue. I encourage you to explore this crucial issue in more depth than I am able to do here.





RESOURCES TO HELP IDENTIFY AND DISMANTLE HARMFUL SYSTEMS OF OPPRESSION AND DE- COMMODIFY AND DECOLONISE YOGA;

AN EDITED SELECTION... INTENDED TO INSPIRE FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

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