

# HOW YOGA PHILOSOPHY CAN TRANSFORM YOUR TEACHING



*Kelly Brandon*

ELEVATE YOUR YOGA,  
TRANSFORM YOUR LIFE

# CONTENTS

Welcome . . . . .	1
About me and my journey. . . . .	3
What is the difference between capital "Y" Yoga and yoga?. . . . .	5
What is yoga?. . . . .	6
Why didn't I learn more during my RYT-200 training? . . . . .	7
Healing or harming? What is largely missed in Western yoga teacher trainings. . . . .	9
Why should I invest in learning more about yoga philosophy?. . . . .	10
How do I learn more now?. . . . .	13
What should I know as a yoga teacher? . . . . .	16
How will this transform my career as a teacher? . . . . .	18
Before you go. . . . .	21

# Congratulations

## on taking your first step towards furthering your knowledge of Yoga and transforming your teaching!

“Go from a human being doing yoga to a human being Yoga.”

– **Baron Baptiste**

First, let me say Thank You! Thank you for being a seeker of knowledge and for understanding the importance of the soul of Yoga — its philosophy.

Yoga is a forever study, and it is important to remember that we are forever students of this transformational philosophy and practice. Continuing our education is not only our duty as teachers, but it also fosters our growth as practitioners.

Pursuing the knowledge of the ancient texts of Yoga not only elevates us as teachers but it gives us a special set of tools — apart from posture and breathing — to better guide, understand, and nurture our students on the emotional, mental, and ultimately spiritual levels.

Sadly, most yoga teacher trainings in the West offer little philosophy education in their programs. Most trainings give a quick overview of the *yamas* and the *niyamas*, or the *Eight Limbs of Yoga* (if at all), and others use more modern, Western self-help books under the guise of “yoga philosophy.” Furthermore, these ancient texts are taught with very little history or context, if any at all.

It's not your fault for not knowing more, it's the fault of many yoga cultures in the West who teach yoga as a physical exercise (or more recently a popularity contest on Instagram), rather than the spiritual practice of transformation it truly is.

This would be fine if we were fitness instructors, wellness coaches, or social media influencers, but we are yogis teaching a 5000 year-old tradition and we are meant to be held to a higher standard!

*Welcome*  
**to My Yoga Community!  
You've Found Your Home!**



"Yoga is firstly for individual growth, but through individual growth, society and community develop."

-B.K.S. Iyengar

## ABOUT ME AND MY JOURNEY

*Kelly Brandon*



I began my yogic path in 2004 practicing and exploring different methods of Yoga. In 2007 I discovered Vinyasa Yoga and have dedicated myself to the Vinyasa method and the *Raja Yoga* path ever since.

I am an E-RYT 500 & YACEP level yoga teacher with over 7000 hours of teaching experience and have been coined the "Teacher of Teachers" since conducting over 12 RYT 200 & RYT 300 Yoga Teacher Trainings in the past ten years.

In addition to Vinyasa Yoga, I have accomplished additional certifications, intensive trainings, and apprenticeships in the methods of Kids & Family Yoga, Yoga for Children with Anxiety, Power Yoga, Yoga for Athletes, Anusara Yoga, Yoga for Injuries, Ashtanga Yoga, and Viniyoga.

I have been very fortunate to have trained with and taught by many of the world's most accomplished and respected yoga teachers, who not only educated me in the physical teachings of yoga – Hatha forceful practices – but also its history, lineage, and philosophy.

For the past five years, I have pursued my passion for Yoga philosophy by intensely studying Sanskrit, Vedic Chanting, and the Sacred Texts of Yoga with my teacher on a weekly basis in the Viniyoga tradition (T.K.V. Desikachar). My area of expertise is the core text of the *Yoga Darshana* known as the *Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*.

Since Yoga is a lifelong pursuit, to this day I continue to study the *Yoga Sūtras*, word for Sanskrit word, weekly with both my teacher and appointed mentor in the Viniyoga lineage and have completed over 400 hours of study to date on this specific text.

It is my mission to share my knowledge to uplift and empower my students in a safe and supportive space. A space where anyone and everyone is invited to experience the gifts of Yoga, connect with their True, Authentic Selves, and create sustainable transformation in their lives.

I endeavor to uphold the traditions of Yoga. In doing so, I encourage my students to appropriately study the ancient texts so they can fortify their practice. My hope is that they also become inspired to pass along their knowledge – to become a link in the chain of Yoga [lineage], helping it grow, lengthen, and endure for future generations.

**Namaste,**

*Kelley Brandon*

E-RYT 500, YACEP



# WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CAPITAL “Y” YOGA AND YOGA?

“[the] practice of *āsanas* without the backing of the *yamas* and *niyamas* is merely acrobatics.”

-B.K.S. Iyengar (Author of *Light on Yoga*)



There is a big difference between Yoga and yoga. Due to the popularity and profitability of yoga in the West, the deeper understanding and ultimate goal of Yoga have become overlooked, diluted, or many times lost entirely.

*Āsana* is not Yoga, it's yoga. *Āsana* is what has been coined as “practice” since the word yoga has become synonymous with what is actually *yoga āsana*.

Being able to put your leg behind your head will not liberate or enlighten you, perfecting a handstand does not make you an advanced practitioner, and completing an RYT200 teacher training does not make you a master yogi.

It's the capital “Y” Yoga that leads us down the path of transformation and accredits us as advanced practitioners. Yoga is *āsana* (posture practice), *prānāyāma* (breathing exercises), *dhyāna* (meditation), all of the *Eight Limbs*, all of the *Yoga Sūtras*, *Bhagavad Gita*, and so on.





# WHAT IS YOGA?

“Yoga has its roots in Indian thought, but its content is universal because it is about the means by which we can make the changes we desire in our lives.”

-TKV Desikachar

Yoga is a philosophy and a lifestyle. An ancient theoretical perspective on how to live a happier, healthier, more peaceful, and balanced life — a spiritual psychology. When studied, integrated, and embodied into your life, it elevates you and leads to transformation — this is the true practice and ultimate goal of Yoga.



Understanding the history, lineages, and different traditions of Yoga, along with the study of ancient texts (specifically the *Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*) enriches us as yogis and gives credibility to us as teachers — separating the knowledgeable and experienced yoga teachers from the more common *āsana* fitness instructors and social media yoga influencers.





# WHY DIDN'T I LEARN MORE DURING MY RYT-200 TRAINING?

In 2020 Yoga Alliance finally upgraded their Registered Yoga School (RYS) training standards to include 30 hours of yoga humanities, which includes philosophy, for all RYT-200 teacher trainings. Yoga Alliance additionally advanced the qualifications for all yoga teachers who lead teacher trainings to hold an E-RYT500 certification: Experienced Registered Yoga Teacher with a minimum of 500 hours of Yoga education, has at least 2000 hours of teaching experience, and has actively taught for four years post-graduate or more. Further, Yoga Alliance enhanced its "Code of Conduct" and "Scope of Practice" policies and additionally added both an "Ethical Commitment" and "Equity in Yoga" policy for all Registered Yoga Schools.

Prior to 2020, only 15 hours of history and philosophy were required curriculum for a teacher training and a lead teacher was only required to hold an E-RYT200 level certification with two years of teaching experience to lead the training.

Unfortunately, to this day, some older RYS schools are actually grandfathered-in and still allowed to conduct RYT-200 trainings under the old "Legacy Standards" until December 2023.

Worse still, some yoga studios are not upholding the standards and practices of their RYS status and others are conducting trainings without any Yoga Alliance accreditation at all. This means that some studios are offering trainings which do not honor the curriculum standards and/or lead teacher qualifications that Yoga Alliance requires.

Why is this happening? Mainly it boils down to three reasons: education, experience, and money. Yoga teacher trainings are big money makers for studios; therefore, a yoga studio that mainly employs new, less experienced, and less educated yoga teachers cannot profit from a yoga teacher training program. In addition, hiring more seasoned yoga teachers (E-RYT500s) is a lot more expensive for a studio than hiring less educated teachers.



The bottom line is that many yoga teachers leading these RYT programs have not studied philosophy in-depth enough to actually teach these texts, provide context, or make them relatable and applicable in modern society. Furthermore, and in all honesty, philosophy doesn't sell trainings but *āsana* does, and as I said before, trainings are big money for studios.

The less experienced and educated a teacher is, the less a studio has to pay them to conduct and lead a training.

As with most occupations, you're paid more for both your level of education and experience.

Essentially, an RYT-200 teacher training (regardless of its accreditation) is an immersion into yoga, not a mastery of it. I like to compare it to a bachelors degree in university. Next, you take an RYT-300 advanced training — the equivalent of a master's degree. Then you either take in-depth continuing education courses in aspects of yoga that you are passionate about, or you complete a yoga therapist training (1000+ hour IAYT program) accomplishing your Ph.D. equivalent, and become a specialist in your field of interest.



# HEALING OR HARMING? WHAT IS LARGELY MISSED IN WESTERN YOGA TEACHER TRAININGS



As I stated in the previous section, philosophy is largely neglected in the West throughout many of the training stages. Yes, there are exceptions and some schools do have a higher focus on philosophy, but these trainings are few and far between. Further, there are only so many hours a training can dedicate to this subject while still covering all of the other areas of study required for an accredited training program.

This is mainly a cultural issue since Westerners have a greater obsession with the physical body and view yoga as a fitness exercise and not the spiritual healing practice it truly is. Since most prospective new teachers are primarily teaching *āsana*, teacher training programs are required to teach the majority of their hours in postural technique and anatomy so that new teachers do not physically harm their students on an anatomical level.

But the bigger question is: If new teachers have such little comprehension of the philosophical side of Yoga, how do they know if their *āsana* and *prānāyāma* instruction isn't harming their students on an energetic, physiological, mental, or emotional level? The answers to these questions are found in the ancient texts, not the anatomy books.



# WHY SHOULD I INVEST IN LEARNING MORE ABOUT YOGA PHILOSOPHY?

“True Yoga is not about the shape of your body, but the shape of your life. Yoga is not to be performed; Yoga is to be lived. Yoga doesn’t care about what you have been; Yoga cares about the person you are becoming. Yoga is designed for a vast and profound purpose, and for it to be truly called Yoga, its essence must be embodied.”

– Aadil Palkhivala

The answer to this question truly lies within you and the type of teacher and practitioner you want to become.

**Ask yourself these questions:**

- ? Do you want to be a Yoga teacher that embodies the essence of the tradition?
- ? Do you want create sustainable transformation in your life?
- ? Do you want to better understand the needs of your students?
- ? Do you want to help guide your students in creating sustainable change in their lives?
- ? Do you want to be part of a traditional Yoga lineage and continue to pass along the flame of knowledge yourself?

If you've answered yes to any of these questions, then investing in the study of Yoga philosophy is paramount. The essence, heart, and soul of Yoga lies in the ancient texts.

Yoga is something you study within yourself, within your relationships, while driving your car, while communicating with friends and colleagues, when talking to strangers, and so on — not just something you do on the mat or cushion.

“Yoga is the journey of the self, through the self, to the self.”

– Bhagavad Gita

Practicing yoga is not practice for practice's sake either — there is an ultimate goal. Understanding what that ultimate goal is, why it is, how it works, what the tools and practices are to achieve it, understanding that there are some obstacles along the way, how to identify those obstacles, learning antidotes for those obstacles, and so on... that is the true practice of Yoga and it can only be learned through studying the philosophical texts.

Although termed a “philosophy,” Yoga is actually a psychology.



It is a very deep study of one's self.



It helps us understand our patterning.



It teaches us how to identify patterning which does not serve us.



It provides a methodology to overcome senseless, and sometimes harmful, patterning.



It teaches us how to create new and more useful patterning which helps us become more balanced and in a state of Yoga.

**This, in turn, helps heal and liberate us.**



As we study these texts and begin to apply these deeper practices within our lives, we begin to see the world very differently. There are shifts in our perception as we clean out the clutter and patterning in our minds and our lives. We then begin to heal, grow, and evolve – this is transformation.

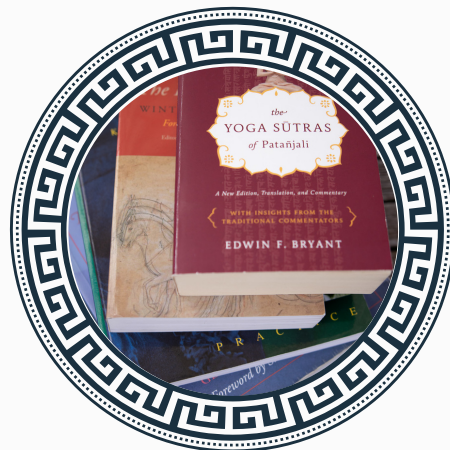
When we study and implement these lessons into our own lives as teachers, we are then also able to identify many of these same patterns, obstacles, and afflictions in our students. Furthermore, we are now equipped with the knowledge, practices, and tools of Yoga to better serve and guide them on their journeys toward growth and healing also.



# HOW DO I LEARN MORE NOW?

"You may be a teacher, but you're always a student"

– Unknown



Regardless of whether or not your yoga training had a strong or weak focus in the areas of history and philosophy, 15 to 30 hours of study is very little time to truly understand, grasp, and apply these principles in your daily life, let alone in your yoga classroom.

As yoga teachers, the one thing we all learn from the very beginning is that Yoga is a forever study – full stop! It is our duty and obligation to continue our studies if we are to further ourselves along the path and, more importantly, to be capable and competent to guide others as well – this is a very important point that is clearly stated in the second limb of *The Eight Limbs of Yoga: Svādhyaya* or the study of ancient texts and scriptures.

The *Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*, specifically, is one of the most important and useful texts to know and understand as a yoga teacher or long term practitioner. It is essentially a curriculum on how to practice Yoga – for anyone! This said, the text is written in *sūtra* form (a specific style of text) which is like a series of prompts, written in a specific manner, with specific spacing, rules, etc., it is not an instruction manual.



As previously stated, Yoga is lineage based in its texts and teachings which are passed down from generation to generation, and they are not able to be fully self-taught.

The *Yoga Sūtras* are meant to be studied with, or taught by, a teacher. Teachers who have studied the *Yoga Sūtras* in depth and read them repeatedly with their teacher(s) are then able to teach the texts themselves, unpacking them and guiding their students in the process.

In the beginning of your study, it is very helpful to have an experienced teacher provide context for what is being said and why. Once you have that, you can go back and reread the *Yoga Sūtras*, they will then make a lot more sense, and you can get a lot more richness from the text.

If you do not have access to an experienced and knowledgeable teacher at the moment, there are some translations and commentaries on the *Yoga Sūtras* which I can recommend to help you get started:

**“The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali”**

by: Edwin F. Bryant

**“The Heart of Yoga”**

by: TKV Desikachar

**“The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali”**

by: Sri Swami Satchidananda

**“The Yamas and Niyamas”**

by Deborah Adele

**“The Tradition of Yoga”**

by: Georg Feuerstein

**“The Bhagavad Gītā”**

by: Winthrop Sargeant

Other ways to learn more are:

- RYT 300 teacher training (with focus on philosophy).
- Find a mentor who specializes in philosophy and study one-on-one with them.
- Acquire a Masters Degree in Traditions of Yoga from a university.
- Take an online or in-person Yoga philosophy course from an educated and experienced teacher.

There are online courses that run anywhere from a few days, to a few weeks, or over a year depending on the depth of the course. For example, I spent 19 months studying the second chapter of the *Yoga Sūtras* with my teacher and then another six months rewriting and transcribing my notes from the course.

As you may know by now, Yoga philosophy is my passion so I enjoy the long and super-deep courses; however, lengthy courses are not necessary to gain a solid understanding of Yoga history and ancient texts.



# WHAT SHOULD I KNOW AS A YOGA TEACHER?

As modern yoga teachers, at the very least, we should have a very solid understanding of what the *Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali* text actually is. This doesn't mean we have to be in-depth scholars of this text but we need to understand the history of how it came to be, its place within the Six Classical Schools of Indian Philosophy (*Darshanas*), the difference between it and the other schools of philosophy (*Tantra, Advaita Vedanta, etc.*), and the historical influences of the text which help provide the necessary context needed to understand it.

Additionally, most teacher trainings are only able to provide a simple outline of the teachings within the *Sūtras*, most commonly it is only a brief overview of the *Eight Limbs of Yoga* and/or the *yamas* and *niyamas*.

These overviews primarily consist of loose (sometimes abstract) translations and definitions of these key points of the text. What most Western teachers do not understand, or have the education and experience to provide, is the context of these Yogic principles and how to actually apply them in daily modern life.

For example, there is a huge difference between knowing just the translation of *ahimsa* (non-violence or non-harming) versus knowing why *ahimsa* is the first *niyama*, how it applies to the following *niyamas*, why it applies to the following *niyamas*, and how to truly practice and apply its principles in modern day life — these are two very different things.

One translation I always see mistranslated and misinterpreted all the time by yoga teachers is *aparigrāha*. Many will say it means non-attachment which is incorrect. Non-attachment is a different word in Sanskrit: *vairagya*. However, they teach *aparigrāha* (which literally means: not grabbing around and non-hoarding) as if it was *vairagya* (non-attachment). They may sound similar by definition, but they are in fact very different. These incorrect teachings lead to a great misunderstanding of the purpose and practice of these philosophical principles.

When it comes to understanding these texts and the principles they teach us, historical reference and context are everything! This is where the importance of an experienced and well-educated teacher is critical in understanding the true and greater meaning of these important teachings.

This is the true tradition of Yoga – generations of teachers passing down the knowledge of Yoga from one generation to the next for over 2000 years, providing context, wisdom, and experience for the newer generations so that the authentic teachings remain alive and with integrity for future generations to come.



# HOW WILL THIS TRANSFORM MY CAREER AS A TEACHER?

“Yoga does not change the way we see things, it transforms the person who sees.”

– B.K.S Iyengar

I can tell you with all certainty that Yoga philosophy will transform you as a practitioner, which will inevitably elevate you as a teacher and enhance your teaching capabilities.

A teacher that studies and understands the ancient teachings of Yoga has greater credibility and stands out among the rest. They naturally sprinkle in little bits of Yoga philosophy and history during their *āsana* classes piquing the interests of their students and reminding them that Yoga is ultimately a spiritual practice, not a physical one – which is really our duty as Yoga teachers, especially Western ones.

If you were ever part of the pre-pandemic yoga studio culture, I’m sure you remember that there were always a few older, seasoned, and knowledgeable teachers that would be caught up in conversations with their students after class.

These post-class conversations weren’t typically about physical injuries or postural accomplishments, these conversations were about how the teacher made the student feel during the class. Maybe it was some sort of energetic shift, a cry in *śavasana*, a feeling or emotion that came up for them during the class, or a question about a philosophical or historical topic the teacher referenced during class.

Regardless of the topic, these conversations were deep, meaningful, and cathartic.

Those seasoned and experienced teachers had the knowledge and capability to not only guide a student on the mat, but also in their life. This is how Yoga philosophy transforms you both as a practitioner, and as a teacher.

As a teacher knowledgeable in philosophy, not only can you reach a wider audience with your credibility, but you can transform your teaching by:

- ✓ Earning more income from your elevated level of education.
- ✓ Connecting with your students in a more meaningful and helpful manner.
- ✓ Creating philosophical-themed classes and workshops that generate more interest and stand out from the crowd.
- ✓ Mentoring and developing continuing education courses for new teachers (online or in-person).
- ✓ Hosting themed master classes and workshops.
- ✓ Teach Yoga at retreats which combine philosophy.
- ✓ Guest lecturing for other studios and teacher trainings.

- ✓ Enjoying a deeper connection in your own practice.
- ✓ Positioning yourself as a yoga teacher with point of difference.
- ✓ Fetching a larger private clientele who seek a more individualized and spiritual practice as they will acknowledge you as life guide versus an exercise coach.



“If we profess to be teaching Yoga, which is a science and art of living, we must practice that way of living ourselves. If we wish only to teach poses or postures, it would be better to call what we do by a name other than Yoga.”

– Donna Farhi





# BEFORE YOU GO...

I hope you enjoyed my e-book and found it helpful, insightful, and inspiring. I further hope that it both encouraged and motivated you to consider expanding your knowledge and studies of Yoga philosophy.

Let's keep in touch! Here's all the ways in which we can stay connected:



## FACEBOOK

Join my Facebook Group: 'Yoga off the mat' [here](#) or follow my personal page [here](#).



## WEBSITE

Take a look around my website [here](#).



## INSTAGRAM

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## WAITLIST

Join my retreat and philosophy course(s) waitlist [here](#).



## MEMBERSHIP

Join my Elite Warrior Online Yoga Membership [here](#).



## MASTERCLASSES

Join my 2023 Yoga History & Yoga Sūtras Overview Online Masterclasses.



## WORKSHOP

Join my 2023 Yoga off the Mat & in Your Life - The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali Workshop series



## 1:1 MENTORING

Discover 1:1 mentoring with me [here](#).



## DISCOVERY CALL

Schedule a discovery call with me [here](#).

THANKYOU



*Kelly Brandon*

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[www.kellybrandonyoga.com](http://www.kellybrandonyoga.com)