


# *The River of* CHANGE

The way we navigate our way through change is a fundamental yogic teaching. EMMA PALMER examines the core principles of change and explains why surrendering to the process will bestow us with more peace, serenity and stillness than ever before.







There have been many times in my life when I vehemently denied to accept change. In fact, I resisted the inevitable with great might. It was after years of self-enquiry that I came to the realisation that pain comes from using every ounce of energy to resist what we cannot change.

One of the most profound teachings I've encountered has been the ancient wisdom of yoga, which helps us to develop our awareness, open our hearts and trust in the flow of life. When we're in tune with the natural laws of the universe and trust in the process, we can learn how to navigate the river of change with wisdom and discernment.

### THE RAPIDS OF CHANGE

When we resist change, we either try to control ourselves with military precision, or we do the same to others. When we resist it, we create a tendency to harden. Physically, the body starts to stiffen; the muscles get tense and systemic changes aim to manage this inner hardening. But from our initial dismay and disappointment, unexpected gifts of opportunity and expansion arise, even if we don't recognise them at the time.

Change can be viewed in one of two ways. It can be viewed as an exciting aspect of life that brings in much-needed transformation or something to fear that brings about a deep level of crippling anxiety. Which one tends to predominate boils down to how we perceive change. Either way, our response is a choice, and how we choose to apply the wisdom teachings to that great life lesson is up to us.

The important question to ask is:

Why do we fear change so much? The brain biochemistry in the limbic system doesn't recognise good or bad change, it just knows to keep us safe, so we tend to self-sabotage when we begin to initiate change. That's why persistence over a prolonged period is necessary to make any sustainable long-lasting change.

### THE TEACHINGS OF NATURE

When we tune in with our environment, we're able to observe profound teachings about the natural laws of the universe. Like nature, life is forever changing, evolving and growing. In nature, change is cyclical and seasonal. Deciduous trees lose their leaves every winter, only to trust their new buds will bloom again come spring. Similarly, the seed of an acorn starts its journey in the deepest and darkest layer in the soil with the desire to find the light. It knows the journey is not a predictable route, but it finds the light anyway.

Humans, on the other hand, resist the natural flow of change, loss and rebirth. As a result, we miss the opportunity to learn the natural laws of the universe. But what if we trusted that life will only send us what we are equipped to handle?

Our very nature is to consistently grow and transform, to realise our fullest and greatest potential. But we can't do that if we're stuck in old, fear-based thought patterns. As we can see in nature, our own lives are subject to constant change, but if we learn to ride each wave with presence and awareness, we can become equipped to survive – and even thrive – through the journey.





# THE YOGIC TEACHINGS OF CHANGE

## DUKHAM

### THE TEACHING OF SUFFERING

Yogic philosophy is anchored in the understanding that clinging to life results in *dukkham* [the Sanskrit word for suffering]. Impermanence reminds us how precious life is, and so the wisdom of change calls us to go inwards to question our need for safety and the futile desire to control that which is uncontrollable.

So why do we resist change with strong will? The essence of spiritual growth is rooted in the soil of transformation, and with that comes the evolution of change. To build our spiritual muscle, it is essential for us to learn to welcome in the challenges that are unfamiliar and, at times, quite painful. It is in this realisation that we begin to navigate change with greater ease, more wisdom and less resistance.





## ANITYA THE TEACHING OF IMPERMANENCE

*The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* – a widely regarded yogic text – refers to the teachings of impermanence and change. This sutra outlines how we experience suffering as a direct result of our reaction to change rather than the change itself. It also relates to the experience of rumination, and continually living in the past with an excruciating inability to move forwards. There is, however, an essence of grace that manifests once we understand and embody the wisdom of how we ride the rapids of change.

In *The Bhagavad Gita* – another key ancient Indian text – it is stated that, “Change is the law of the Universe”. The Gita teaches us that according to the natural law, nothing ever remains the same. When we accept change, we welcome it into our lives, and even

allow ourselves to get excited about that which is occurring. Moreover, we’re able to recognise that change is a natural part of growth and evolution. The more we build the openness to life’s natural ebb and flow, the more we will experience an unwavering sense of peace and stillness.

The teachings of impermanence – known in Sanskrit as *anitya* – are shared in the *Katha Upanishad*, an ancient yogic text believed to be written between 1400 and 800 BC. Even as far back as 800 BC, the yogis knew nothing that exists in the material world lasts forever. They also recognised that the source of suffering is experienced through wanting everything to stay the same.

Anxiety often presents itself when the nervous system intuitively feels life’s impermanence. Thankfully, a yoga practice provides us with the tools to transform fear to faith. If we allow it, impermanence has the power to open

our hearts so that we can live with more conviction and passion than ever before. As B.K.S. Iyengar – one of the foremost yogic teachers in the world – stated, “Our yoga practice not only changes the way we perceive life, but it changes the person who sees.”

So, if these ancient teachings divert our attention away from that which is impermanent, what does it direct us towards? It asks us to go deeper, to connect with that part of us that does exist forever, that is unchangeable and ever-present, and that is the nature of our soul.

***“To build our spiritual muscle, it is essential for us to learn to welcome in the challenges that are unfamiliar and, at times, quite painful.”***



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## APARIGRAHA

### THE WISDOM OF NON-ATTACHMENT

*Aparigraha* [the Sanskrit word for non-attachment] is a powerful yogic teaching that supports us to learn ways that we can be open to change without being attached to the outcome. This presents an opportunity to build faith in the ways life naturally unfolds and to let go of the need to control the outcome or influence the ways we would rather experience situations. Through this exercise, we build faith and trust that life's intelligence may in fact guide us on a path we may not have necessarily chosen, but one that in the long run teaches us most.

## SVADHYAYA

### THE WISDOM OF SELF-ENQUIRY

Through the practice of *svadhyaya* [the Sanskrit word for self-enquiry] we begin to discover ways we can identify the blocks of inner resistance to change and transform them into effortless surrender, faith and flow. Through our yoga practice, we take the journey inwards. When we develop our

practice, we are able to ask the internal guidance system for the wisdom that equally awaits our questioning. With this, we're guided to a place of indisputable faith, as we navigate the inward journey of life, open to change, and the teachings that are yet to come.

***“The essence of spiritual growth is rooted in the soil of transformation, and with that comes the evolution of change.”***

When we practise yoga through the sequence of *vinyasa krama* [a step-by-step progression] and as the breath weaves its way through each asana, we find ways to honour the inevitable river of change. As we deepen our practice, we learn how we can draw from the ancient wisdom of yoga to support us to choose to release from the struggle and learn how to swim downstream with the flow of life versus upstream. When we follow the natural current of life, the opportunity for learning and wisdom become available to us. ■





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