

the yoga plate

Bring Your Practice into the Kitchen
with 108 Simple & Nourishing Vegan Recipes



TAMAL & VICTORIA DODGE



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off the mat, into the kitchen

For humanity to evolve spiritually, this diet is essential.

More than 36 million Americans today practice yoga. To be specific, more than 36 million people today practice the *physical postures* of yoga, known as *asana*. Talk to the vast majority of these asana practitioners, and they'll tell you that yoga has in some way bettered their lives, whether it be physically, mentally, emotionally, or spiritually.

But what so many of these 36 million Americans don't realize is that they are experiencing only the tip of the iceberg in their yoga practice. In fact, asana is just one of the Eight Limbs of Yoga as set forth by yogic master Patanjali in the Yoga Sutras circa 400 CE. However, in India, the birthplace of yoga, talk to the 99 percent of the country's population who are yogis, and they will tell you that asana is the least essential of their yoga

practices. There, far more attention is placed on the philosophy of yoga than on the physicality of it. Without embedding the philosophy of yoga into its physical practice, Western yogis are missing out on so much.

Yoga is about far more than spending an hour on a rubber mat. It is about creating a spiritual life by transforming our daily activities into actions infused with a higher consciousness. That said, yoga is not a religion; it is nonsectarian and nondenominational. The path of yoga is about taking our lifestyle and moving it into a realm that harmonizes our will with the highest source.

The word *yoga* translates as "yoke." By definition, the ultimate goal of yoga is to yoke together—or create union—between the soul and our higher

source by infusing our daily activities with spiritual intention and mindfulness.* By design, then, yoga is a prescription for a complete lifestyle that leads practitioners to a better, more whole and peaceful way of living. They are more connected to themselves; more connected to their bodies, to their minds, hearts, and souls; to other life on this planet; to the environment; and to the Supreme Soul. Asana is the gateway, yes—but there’s so much more to explore.

How we eat is a key component in all of this because it represents both how we treat and nourish ourselves and how we view and care for the world and resources around us. We can make food choices that support us in both specific and holistic ways in body, mind, and spirit. Until now, there has yet to be a modern book that sets forth the correlation between yoga as a holistic practice, the dietary decisions we make, and the mind-set with which we view and eat food. With yoga now widely practiced throughout the United States, the time is ripe to introduce readers to the next level of

their practice, so that they can take their yoga beyond just their mat and onto their plate.

Our modern culture is more technologically advanced than ever before. Yet at the same time, we have regressed in our ability to sustain the environment around us. It would seem like an oxymoron to say we are advanced but also primitive in our society, yet this truth is unfolding before our very eyes. According to the yoga system, the reason for such rise and decline is that we are indifferent when it comes to looking at the existence of the soul and our own spiritual well-being. You see, the more we rely on our senses and material perception, the more we may gain materially, but on the flip side we drastically decline spiritually.

Yoga teaches us that our senses are limited and that we shouldn’t rely on them for the answers to life. For example, if we are in the desert and in the distance we think we see water and decide to chase after it, we get there only to discover it was a mirage. Our senses tricked us—we couldn’t decipher what was real and what was fake.

* Just a note: God is called many names: Rama, Yahweh, Jehovah, Gopala, Allah, Krishna, and so on. In the Yoga Sutras, Patanjali refers to God as Ishvara, which means “Supreme Soul.” To honor the yoga system, we will be referring to God as the Supreme Soul throughout this book. However, you should refer to the higher source in whatever way feels most comfortable to you. After all, the main point is to create a personal connection between ourselves and our higher source.

The yoga system encourages us to go beyond what our eyes, noses, ears, touch, and taste can tell us and move into a life filled with spiritual practice that takes us past the confines of the temporary material body. When we engage our mind and senses in spiritual rigor, we purify our consciousness, bringing us to a state of pure clarity and unselfish, magnanimous behavior. We start to look at the world differently, and we treat the world and all its living entities with kindness, compassion, and love.

The culture of today is telling us to eat more, buy more, enjoy more, and take in as much excess as possible before we die. Our culture has spun so far out of control that we are trying to enjoy material life at any cost, regardless of the impact on others and the world. We have put so much emphasis on living the material dream that we have lost sight of anything suggestive of spiritual consciousness.

When we believe we are material beings living in a material world, we tend to treat our planet like a landfill, without much regard for the future of everyone. But when we know that we are spiritual beings living in a material world and it is our duty to elevate our consciousness and those around us, then we start making progress in huge leaps and bounds. We want to create a minimal carbon footprint while leaving a huge spiritual exclamation point at the

end of our road. Then we know that we have been of service to the planet and used our bodies wisely.

We are on such a fast track in our society that we don't realize how much harm we are doing even with the food we eat. We are told to consume hamburgers, milkshakes, pizza, and junk food, which is bad not only for our bodies but for our whole ecosystem. Even fad diets that may appear healthy can have a negative effect on the planet's resources. Our dietary habits cause astronomical amounts of damage to the world around us.

Yoga teaches us to examine and question life, to search our hearts and minds regularly, and to use our intellect for spiritual study and growth. And what better place to start than with the food we eat? The information and advertisements we take in do not put the planet and spiritual well-being at the forefront. It falls on us as individuals to look into these subjects and create change. We have all heard the old adage "Change starts with one." Our actions can create a ripple effect and eventually lead us to building a spiritual culture.

We will be introducing you to the philosophy of yoga as it is reflected in our eating choices. All of the recipes in this book have been designed according to the concept of ahimsa, or nonharm, which is part of the first limb of the Eight Limb Path. With ahimsa in mind, we try to cause the least harm possible to all living

creatures. This is an extremely important part of yogic philosophy when it comes to eating—after all, the way most of us cause harm throughout our lives, consciously or not, is by way of what we put in our mouths.

Another precept included in the Eight Limb Path is *dhyana*, which translates to “devotion” or “meditation.” In the yogic context, meditation means much more than just sitting in silence or chanting for a set amount of time. It refers to actually living our lives in a more spiritually conscious manner. The manner in which we eat offers a great avenue for infusing more mindfulness into our daily

routine. With that in mind, we will also demonstrate how to eat differently, not just in terms of what you’re eating but, as importantly, *how* you’re eating.

Although the delicious plant-based diet we present in this book offers a ton of health and nutritional benefits, far more significantly, it opens the doorway to a greater understanding of the connection between body, mind, and spirit.

This book is not merely a cookbook, nor is it yet another guide to yoga poses. Instead, it is a jumping-off point for living a yoga life that feeds the soul and embraces the ancient writings and teachings upon which yoga was built within the context of the modern world.

Engage your mind in thinking of Me,
offer obeisances and worship Me.
Being completely absorbed in Me,
you will surely come to Me.

BHAGAVAD GITA AS IT IS 9:34

ahimsa

The time is right to do what is right.

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

Patanjali's Eight Limbs of Yoga consist of two main components: *yamas* (things we must abstain from in order to lead a spiritual and ethical yogic life) and *niyamas* (spiritual observances). The very first of the *yamas* is *ahimsa*, or nonharm. This principle lies at the very heart of yoga and should be applied to everything—how we treat ourselves, how we treat others, and how we treat the world around us.

Of course, it's logistically impossible to make it through life without causing any harm whatsoever. We live in a world in which we cannot escape creating some kind of pain. This world has been set up as being "perfectly imperfect." If we walk across a park, we will step on ants. If we wipe sweat off our forehead, we will kill millions of bacteria. So how do we create the least amount of harm while we are

here on this earth? If we cannot escape killing and harming completely, then how do we minimize our footprint?

With this in mind, we do the best we can. The truth of the matter is that, even without consciously abiding by the Eight Limbs of Yoga, most of us innately attempt to live our lives in a way that doesn't inflict harm on others. However, one way in which even the most gentle and aware among us *do* cause harm is by eating in an unconscious manner. We don't stop to consider where our food is coming from or how it is making its way to our plate. For most of us, eating offers a prime avenue for becoming more aware of the earth and living beings around us and of alleviating some of the harm we are causing, often without even really being conscious of it!

One of the arguments we often hear about practicing *ahimsa* by eating a

plant-based diet is, “Well, plants are living things, too, and you’re harming them!” This is true. Every living being on this planet—whether it be a human or an animal or a tree—has what yogis call a *jiva-atma*, or a soul, residing within it.

However, again, the idea of ahimsa is to cause the *least* amount of harm possible. We like to explain it this way: let’s think about the difference between eating a carrot and a cow, bearing in mind that, in each case, we are causing harm. When we eat a carrot, we harm the carrot. But to make a cow eligible for slaughter, she must weigh at least a thousand pounds. In order for cows to gain weight, they need to eat and metabolize food, just like humans do. Specifically, for a cow to gain one pound, she has to eat between sixteen and twenty pounds of grain. Let’s stop and think about this for a moment. This means that before we can even think about eating a cow, an enormous number of plants have to be killed in order to feed her. Imagine how many *people* you could feed with that amount of grain, compared to the one pound of beef protein that it produces.

The harm doesn’t stop there. It takes 2,500 gallons of water for a cow to produce one pound of beef. In other words, it takes 2.5 million gallons of water to get a single cow to one thousand pounds. And beyond that, animal agriculture is also one of the leading

causes of air and water pollution and deforestation. The amount of harm caused by these two environmental hazards is unquantifiable.

Now think about the fact that one-seventh of the world’s population today is starving. One of the primary reasons is that most of the world’s grains and produce are used to feed animals for slaughter. These animals add up to a much smaller amount of food than the grains and produce—it is food designated only for the people who can afford it. Perhaps you’ve heard the saying, “If everyone wanted to eat a meat-based diet, we would need two planet earths”?

But if everyone ate a plant-based diet, we could *feed* two planet earths. Aside from just harming the animals who go to slaughter, to produce them we are using up food and water resources that leave other humans wanting, and we are polluting the earth. That’s a lot of harm for a single meal. And we’re willing to bet that most of the people who pay into that vicious cycle have no desire to create any harm.

When we eat a vegan diet, we can avoid all of this harm—and without sacrificing any of the taste. We can feel good about our choices for ourselves and for the world around us. We are literally playing a role in decreasing the suffering of an entire planet, including the human beings, animals, plants, and the very earth we walk upon. Think of what an impact you

can have by making different, mindful decisions about what you fuel your body with at least three times a day, every day of your life!

Eating this way has other advantages. When we eat vibrant whole foods in place of meat and dairy, our bodies start humming along in a more natural rhythm, making us feel both physically better and more spiritually connected. Eating a whole-food, plant-based diet nourishes our body in a unique and noticeable way because the food is of a higher quality and nutrient content than processed foods. The plethora of vitamins, minerals, and essential nutrients fuel our physical constitution at the highest level. In the same way as a car will run more smoothly for a longer period of time when it is

provided with high-grade fuel, so too will our bodies. And just as our bodies are better nourished with the vitamins and minerals plants provide, so too are our brains, which makes us quicker and more alert. Spiritually, we become more attuned to the life and resources around us, and we experience a greater sense of gratitude and interconnection.

Victoria is a prime example of this. As daunting as the idea of giving up meat and meat-based products initially was to her, today there's no looking back. Not only does she feel stronger and more physically energized, but her entire life has shifted. She feels more aligned with and attuned to the world around her. She no longer searches for happiness in material things but, rather, turns to spiritual matters and meditation for fulfillment.

O son of Kunti, all that you do, all that you eat,
all that you offer and give away,
as well as all austerities that you may perform,
should be done as an offering unto Me.

BHAGAVAD GITA AS IT IS 9:27

Life as Meditation

Perhaps it sounds strange to equate our eating habits with spirituality and meditation. But, aside from the very real effects of knowing you are living life in a way that is creating minimal pain and a more sustainable world, when we eat mindfully, literally everything shifts. Another component of the Eight Limbs of Yoga involves offering all of our actions to our higher power. Everything in our life becomes spiritualized because it is all an offering. Our work becomes spiritual, our movement becomes spiritual, and our food becomes spiritual. Of course, this idea is not limited to the yogic tradition. If you grew up in a Christian household, you may have said grace before a meal. Or if you are Jewish, perhaps you eat certain foods that are symbolic in recognition of specific occasions. It's the same with yoga. We eat our meals mindfully, aware of what we have been given, and as an offering.

This doesn't have to involve more than taking a moment before we eat to ask God to accept our food or to have it first. You'll notice there's a slight difference between this and the concept of grace, wherein we thank God for being a provider. Instead, we are offering our food as if the sacred is our friend whom we want to share it with. This practice has been performed throughout the ages in India, the seat of yoga.

When Tamal explains this point to his students or workshop attendees, he often offers the following anecdote as an analogy. Every year on Tamal's birthday, our son, Kanai, asks Tamal for ten dollars. Kanai takes the ten dollars and goes to a toy store, where he buys something like Legos or a GI Joe. He then comes home and wraps the toy up in paper and duct tape. One of Tamal's favorite moments of every year is when Kanai steps into the room, gift in hand and a huge smile on his face, holding the package out for Tamal to open. Of course, Tamal doesn't need whatever toy Kanai has selected, and it was Tamal who provided the money for Kanai to purchase the toy in the first place. It's the act of exchange and what it represents that's so meaningful.

In much the same way, the Supreme Soul doesn't need the food He provides us with. After all, He's the one who gave it to us in the first place! It's the exchange that matters, from a spiritual perspective. This concept is known as *prasadam*. When we eat with the awareness of food as an exchange between ourselves and our original source, it becomes holy food, and the act of eating it becomes infused with spiritual meaning. Every time we put food into our mouths, we are building a state of awareness about our relationship with a higher power and the exchange that is

constantly happening between us. Rather than just consuming, we are receiving. When we begin to look at life through this lens, our entire mind-set shifts.

From the moment we are born, our bodies are in a state of perpetual change, altering and aging. Throughout our life, our circumstances change, the locations we live in change, and so on. When our financial, physical, and

mental circumstances alter, so do our ideas and the ways we perceive the world. Likewise, the more we spiritually infuse our life through acts and rituals like offering our food to the Supreme Soul, the more conscious of that which is greater than us we become aware of. We begin to adjust our mind-set into one of seeing, feeling, and willing in the direction of the spiritual.



Feel Good, Do Good

We're sure you've heard the phrase "Food is medicine." Well, it is. And there's no doubt that when we put good things into our body, it also becomes much easier to put good stuff back out into the world. Think about your own life: we're willing to bet that when you feel sluggish and depressed, it takes extra energy to interact with those around you in a mindful, compassionate way. But when you're feeling energized and vibrant, that's what you reflect back out to those in your life and to the world in general, right?

The plant-based foods around us offer all of the minerals and nutrients we need to run like a well-oiled machine. Not only that, but they also provide us with a source of natural medicine to remedy the

ailments that arise throughout the course of a life. The better you eat, the better you'll feel, and you'll learn what your body requires to run at its optimal level. The recipes included in this book will provide you with exactly the foods you need to feel good. Once you've experienced life in this bright, vitality-filled way, it's pretty hard to look back.

The recipes in this book will satisfy and excite adults, but kids will love them, too. This is great news for parents. As you begin to learn that eating mindfully is both delicious and health enhancing, you can ingrain this lifestyle in your kids so that they don't have to reprogram their thoughts about food at some point down the road. Instead, they'll grow up with the understanding that food can be used in

a way that makes us feel good. Case in point: Our nine-year-old son, Kanai, has been drinking green drinks and eating salads and whole grains since he was very young. As we fed him different things, we would explain specifically how they made him strong and healthy. Because, as we know, kids are like little sponges, Kanai already knows more about food and nutrition than many adults do. He's already made the correlation on his own about how certain foods can make you feel bad or sick. When Kanai does get sick, he has an innate understanding of what foods will make him feel better and can articulate why he needs to eat a specific food or food type.

Amazingly, because Kanai has been brought up this way, he actually makes the decision to turn down cakes and sweets at birthday parties and go for healthier options because, as he puts it, "It's not good for me." (Let's be honest, this kid has some incredible willpower,

too!) We also use Kanai as an example here because he proves a big point that applies to adults and kids alike: when our baseline is to feel good, we want to keep feeling that way and are motivated to eat in a way that bolsters our health. And as our bodies begin to align themselves with natural food sources, we develop a certain rhythm that allows us to know what we need and when we need it. We are more thoughtful about our food choices, and the increased wellness that results allows us to interact with the world in a more present and energized way.

We have seen this time and time again through the myriad students that have come out of Tamal's yoga teacher training programs. Many of these students have permanently adopted a whole-food, plant-based yoga diet. These graduates constantly tell us how their lives have changed forever due to the immense amount of energy, peace, and satisfaction they have achieved by adopting a yogic diet.